ABBOT PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 3011 00049 967 1

ABBOT PUBLIC LIBRARY
MARBLEHEAD, MASS. 01945

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/matornisvineyard0000ephi

MATORNI'S VINEYARD

MATORNI'S VINEYARD

By

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1928

Copyright, 1928,
By Little, Brown, and Company

All rights reserved
Published, October, 1928

Printed in the United States of America

The period of this story is 1940, and the characters are entirely imaginary and have no relation to any living person.

MATORNI'S VINEYARD

CHAPTER I

Mervyn Amory, although he had been one of the first to obey the summons of the uniformed attendant with his clanging bell, found the restaurant car of the Blue Train practically full. The head waiter, who knew him by sight, ushered him to a table for two, occupied by one other man.

"A close shave!" the newcomer exclaimed, as he seated himself. "I had no idea that the train was so full. People seem to hide themselves in these small compartments."

His vis-à-vis, who had watched the arrival of his companion for the meal with an expression of anxious disquietude, shrugged his shoulders slightly with an apologetic gesture. Mervyn repeated his remark in French.

"Yes, you were fortunate to get a place," the other agreed. "I took my seat here at Paris. The second service is inferior and it is late. It is a surprise to me, also, to find so many people travelling."

"The Riviera season grows earlier every year," Mervyn observed.

His companion made no answer, and in the brief silence which followed Mervyn took more careful note of him. He was a square-shouldered, sallow-faced man, with many wrinkles in his face, deep-set eyes and a somewhat nervous manner. On more than one occasion he turned in his seat, and seemed to be taking stock of the little crowd of diners—an inter-

est on his part, however, which seemed to savour rather of apprehension than of curiosity. Mervyn, following his example, was attracted by one person only—a girl whose eyes met his frankly enough, but with an interest which she scarcely troubled to conceal. She was more than ordinarily good-looking—beautiful in the classic, creamy-complexioned, brown-eyed type of Northern Italy. She was plainly dressed in black, unrelieved save for a slight white band around the neck, and she had removed her hat, which hung in the rack above her. Awaiting the service of her dinner, she was smoking a cigarette, and sipping from a small wineglass. Mervyn was not conscious of ever having seen her before, but his intense and growing interest in her was obviously reciprocated. He leaned forward towards his companion.

"Am I right," he enquired, "in thinking that you are an Italian?"

The man frowned slightly.

"Why do you ask me that?" he demanded.

"A fellow traveller's curiosity," Mervyn replied. "Your French seemed to me just a little liquid."

"And granted that I am an Italian?"

"I was about to direct your attention to one of the most beautiful types of your fellow country-women—that is, if I am not mistaken in her nationality. She might be French, of course, but I don't think she is. You will have to look just a little farther behind."

The man swung round in his seat.

"The last table but one on the other side," Mervyn whispered. "The young woman is smoking. She wears no hat and her hair is marvellous."

Mervyn's companion gave only a perfunctory glance in the direction indicated. Then he shot a quick look across the table. His brows were puckered, his manner unduly nervous.

"Why do you draw my attention to that young lady?" he asked suspiciously.

"For no special reason, so far as you are concerned," Mervyn assured him. "I permit myself to admire her immensely. That is all. I am not, as a rule, interested in strangers, but I should like to know her name and everything about her. You ought to be able to recognise any one of your own nationality. I am right, am I not, in believing that she is Italian?"

The man moved uneasily in his seat.

"How should I know anything about her?" he demanded. "She might be of any race, so far as I am concerned."

Mervyn made no attempt to pursue the conversation, for which his companion was obviously disinclined. Presently the service of dinner along a stretch of perhaps the worst laid railroad in any civilised country made even the barest exchange of remarks difficult. The two men relapsed into silence, and the meal proceeded without further incident, save that to Mervyn it seemed a curious thing that every time he raised his head and looked down the car he

met the eyes of the fair Italian. There was nothing in them of purposeful allure, not the slightest indication of any desire for a flirtation, simply a persistently speculative interest, as though for some reason his being on that particular train, and in that particular seat, puzzled her. Yet, when she left the car, which she did a little before the others, although she nodded pleasantly to a small hook-nosed man, seated in their vicinity, who rose to his feet, returning her greeting with much deference, she passed the table at which Mervyn and his companion were seated without even a glance. Her interest in him, if it had ever existed, appeared to have evaporated. Mervyn, surprising a peculiar look in his companion's face as he watched her disappear, was encouraged to address him again.

"I am right, am I not, in believing that Mademoiselle is Italian?" he asked.

The man assented.

"Yes, she is Italian—partially Italian, at any rate. She is of the type," he went on, "which has produced the most beautiful and the most vicious women in the world's history. If one may trust to our Old Masters, Beatrice was like that—she of the Cenci, I mean—also that shameful wife of Andrea del Sarto, and the Medicis."

"This girl's face seems to have too much of humour for cruelty," Mervyn observed.

His companion produced a gold-chased tobacco box and rolled a cigarette.

"It is perhaps because of an admixture of races," he said. "Her physiognomy is pure Italian, but—"

He broke off in his sentence. He had caught the steady regard of the hook-nosed little man opposite, and the words seemed to die away upon his lips.

"But," Mervyn suggested gently.

"I know nothing whatever about the young lady. Nor do I care for discussing strangers," he concluded abruptly.

Coffee was served, and, one by one, the remaining diners began to vacate the car. Mervyn remained till nearly the last, and it was suddenly borne in upon him that his companion, who had paid his bill some time before, was lingering to bear him company, although he remained obstinately silent. His impression was confirmed when at last he rose to go, for the Italian promptly followed his example. They made their uncertain way out together until they reached the last car, in which Mervyn's compartment was situated. He turned the handle and was on the point of entering, when the man suddenly addressed him.

"I should like a word with you—inside your compartment, if I may," he said, with a sudden and noticeable return to his initial nervousness.

"With pleasure," Mervyn agreed, standing on one side, and ushering him in. "Take the corner seat, and have a smoke. There are some cigarettes there."

The self-invited visitor seemed scarcely to hear the invitation. His behaviour continued to be ec-

centric. He suddenly reopened the door of the compartment, and looked up and down the corridor. Satisfied as to its emptiness, he closed it again firmly.

"You are an Englishman?" he asked abruptly.

"I am English, as my accent probably told you," was the prompt reply.

"Your accent is *extraordinarily* good. May I ask your name?"

"Mervyn Amory—if it really interests you. Suppose you tell me yours?"

"Mine doesn't matter," the other declared. "If you knew it, it would tell you nothing. Mervyn Amory," he repeated reflectively. "You come south on pleasure?"

There was the faintest impulse of resentment in the young man's face at this direct questioning. His eyes shone for a moment with something of the keenness of his companion's.

"Naturally," he assented. "I play tennis."

For some reason or other the reply seemed to gratify his questioner. Something of the suspicion departed from his manner.

"I remember the name," he admitted. "You play tennis, yes. You are fortunate at your age, Mr. Mervyn Amory, to be able to devote your time to your favourite sport."

"Is it to congratulate me upon my laziness that you invited yourself here?" Mervyn demanded bluntly.

"It was not. It was to ask of you the service

which a man who finds himself suddenly in danger is entitled to ask of a sympathetic human being."

Mervyn was now frankly puzzled. He looked at this strange visitor in amazement.

"But what service could I possibly render you?" he asked. "Why are you driven to ask a service at all of a perfect stranger? And if you are, why select me?"

"A few minutes ago," the Italian said earnestly, "I remarked that I was not a physiognomist. I lied. I take note always of people's faces. It is part of the profession into which I have been pushed late in life. I believe you to be a young man of honesty and of courage. I believe, too, that you have all the Englishman's large-heartedness."

He unfastened his coat and waistcoat, and drew from some part of his under apparel a packet, sealed at each end, tied with thin gold string, but unaddressed.

"You go to Monte Carlo?" he enquired.

"Yes."

"Where do you stay?"

"At the Paris."

The man glanced over his shoulder towards the door.

"Will you kindly place that in your pocket?"

Mervyn, after a moment's hesitation, did as he was bidden, and buttoned up his coat. His companion drew a long breath of relief, took a cigarette from the open box on the mahogany stand, and lit it.

"Listen," he continued, "there is one characteristic about your race which I have always admired, and upon which I now rely. It is your sympathy for the weaker side. I am on the weaker side in Italian politics. I have been on a secret mission to a certain European country; I have been betrayed—in what fashion I do not know—and I am in danger. If I am permitted to reach Monte Carlo unmolested—which I do not for a moment believe—I will relieve you of all responsibility. I will take the packet and arrange for its delivery myself. If, however, anything should happen to me upon the journey, I beg that you will place that packet in some place of safety, and wait until some one, who shall establish his credentials in the manner which I shall describe, demands it from you."

Mervyn was still perplexed.

"What would the credentials be of the person to whom I am to deliver the packet?" he enquired.

The man, notwithstanding his nervous state, smiled weakly.

"They will seem foolish to you," he admitted, "but their very simplicity has stood us in good stead. You will be invited to some feast or festivity, and there will be a superfluous 'e' at the end of the word indicating the nature of that festivity. Not only that, but in the bottom left-hand corner, there will be a blot, smudged with the finger. To conclude, and this is very important, there is the name of a place, which must be quoted by any one seeking to obtain

the packet. For this month it would be Venice; for next month Florence; for the month after Rome."

Mervyn looked searchingly at his companion. There was no doubt whatever that the man was in deadly earnest.

"I will do what you ask," he consented, "so long as you assure me that there is nothing criminal in the affair."

"There is nothing criminal in it."

"But tell me," Mervyn persisted, "if you belong to the unpopular political party in Italy and are carrying papers, I can understand that you might find yourself in trouble as soon as you had crossed the frontier, but what can happen to you upon this train? We are on French soil. No one would dare to interfere with you."

The Italian smiled bitterly.

"If nothing should happen to me upon this train, sir," he said, "you will be relieved of all responsibility. I have taken every possible precaution. All the compartments in this car, except mine and yours, are empty, because they were taken and paid for in my name. You took yours so long ago that when they told me who you were, I did not interfere."

"Rather an expensive way of travelling," Mervyn suggested.

His visitor shrugged his shoulders.

"Was it not Napoleon," he asked scornfully, "who called you Englishmen a nation of shopkeepers? It is the pounds, shillings and pence which count with

you. Yet, when a man's life is in danger, of what value is money? And I tell you, Signor, that though I shall sleep with my door bolted, though, save for the attendant, you and I will be the only people in this *voiture*, I do not expect to see the morning alive. I wish you good night, Signor."

He rose to his feet, and Mervyn opened the door of the compartment.

"Such things don't really happen, you know," he said, smiling encouragingly. "I'm afraid you're suffering from a fit of nerves. I shall return you the packet on Monte Carlo platform."

"It is my hope," was the quiet reply.

CHAPTER II

Mervyn Amory, some hours later, awoke from a sound sleep with that acute yet subconscious start which is the presage of undefined danger. He lay quite still for a moment, trying to collect himself. The carriage was in complete darkness, and through the half-opened window he could hear the roar of the locomotive as the heavy train rumbled and jolted through the night. Yet he knew quite well that there was some fainter noise which had disturbed him, something close at hand. He turned slightly on his pillow and switched on the shaded lamp above his head. By his watch, which hung underneath, he saw that it was half-past three. Then, as he leaned over and turned on the other switch, he suddenly realised that the door, which he had carefully bolted, stood half open. He looked at it in amazement. Before he could obey his first impulse and spring out of bed, some one who was clutching the frame work of the door swayed into the gap, and he heard a voice almost in his ear.

"Can I speak to you, please?"

He was out in a moment, holding the door wide open. In the gloom of the corridor he could see the shape and features of his visitor indistinctly, but he realised at once that it was the Italian girl who stood there, and that, for some reason, she was afraid.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Something has happened, I am sure," she fal-

tered, "in the next compartment to yours. I heard a noise soon after we left Lyons—a groan. I have knocked at the door, but there is no answer."

"I'll call the attendant," Mervyn proposed, hurrying into his dressing gown.

"I'm afraid you will find it difficult," was the tremulous reply. "I have tried to wake him up. I cannot."

She moved down the corridor, and Mervyn followed her. After a few steps, however, she suddenly gripped his arm. They both came to a standstill. She pointed downwards, to the narrow carpeted way. Almost at their feet there was a thin stream of something which seemed to be coming from under the door.

"It was from there I heard the cry," she told him. "It is the compartment of the man who sat at your table at dinner time."

They listened for a moment, whilst Mervyn tapped first gently, and then louder, on the door. There was no response, no sound inside. He tried the handle, but the bolt was evidently drawn. They hurried down to the farther end of the corridor. In the last compartment, with the door wide open, the conductor was lying at full length.

"Wake up!" Mervyn called out.

There was no reply. The man was breathing heavily, and made no response to a second summons. Mervyn stooped over him and listened for a moment.

"Drugged!" he exclaimed. "Wait here, and I will get the attendant from the next *voiture*."

The girl nodded. Mervyn stepped over the swaying platform, but instead of at once completing his mission, he paused for a moment, cautiously retraced his steps, and looked down the corridor which he had left. His heart gave a little jump as he saw that the girl had already half disappeared through the doorway of his own compartment. He hesitated, then turned around and completed his errand, returning with a dazed attendant from the next *voiture*. The man, half asleep, was plainly terrified. He looked down at his heavily slumbering *confrère*, whom several hearty kicks failed to awaken, gazed with horror at the stream of blood growing longer inch by inch across the carpet, and seemed on the point of collapse.

"There is only one thing to be done," Mervyn told him sharply. "You must stop the train. Do it at once, or I shall."

The man, with trembling fingers, pulled the signal. The girl drew Mervyn inside one of the empty compartments.

"Please sit with me," she begged. "I am feeling faint. This is terrible."

"It must have been a shock for you," he sympathised.

"I was fast asleep," she went on. "I woke. I heard people moving about. I think that there must have been a struggle."

"But which was your compartment?" he enquired curiously.

"The one next to his on the other side," she confided, with a shiver.

Mervyn turned and faced her.

"But when we came back together," he said, "every compartment was empty. He told me that he had engaged every one in his own name, except mine."

"That was probably the truth," she admitted. "Mine was in the next *voiture*, but I had my back to the engine, and it was impossible for me to sleep. I persuaded the attendant to change me. He grumbled, but I tipped him well. I wish—oh, I wish so much that I had stayed where I was!"

The train was slackening speed. She looked out of the window. Unsteadied by the rapid application of the brakes, they were rocking from side to side.

"We are stopping," she whispered. "Will they ask us questions?"

"Naturally," he replied, "but not many here, I should think. There is one I should very much like to ask you, however."

She looked at him, and suddenly he wondered whether she were so much afraid as she seemed.

"What is it?" she asked.

"How you managed to open the door of my compartment?"

Her fine silky eyebrows were a little upraised.

"But it was so easy," she answered. "I just turned the handle."

"The door was bolted."

She shook her head.

"I knocked first. Then I just turned the handle. The door opened at once. You may have thought that you bolted it, but you must have forgotten."

The train had come to a standstill. There was the sound of voices on the line, the dimly seen figures of men swinging lanterns. Presently a uniformed official, followed by the attendant from the further *voiture*, came to the door of their compartment.

"What have Monsieur and Madame to report?" he demanded. "The attendant says that he stopped the train at your orders."

"I heard what sounded like a scuffle in the next compartment," the girl recounted. "I rang for the attendant but there was no answer. I got up and went to find him. He was sleeping so heavily that I could not wake him. Then I walked along the corridor, and saw blood coming from underneath the door next to mine. You can see it, if you look. Afterwards I found Monsieur. I woke him up, and he stopped the train."

The official retreated. They heard him try the door of the compartment in which the tragedy had happened. Then he left the *voiture*, climbed on to the footboard outside, and peered in through the window. Presently he returned.

"There is a man in there who appears to be dead," he announced.

"Where are we?" Mervyn enquired.

"Not far from Valence. I shall telegraph to the *Chef de Sûreté* at Marseilles. There is no one here who can deal with such a matter. I myself shall remain on guard."

"What about the attendant?" Mervyn asked.

"As yet he remembers nothing. He is awake, but too ill to be questioned."

The official disappeared, and presently the train with its freight of men and women rumbled on into the darkness. Mervyn pointed out of the corridor window to where a faint streak of white light seemed to have split the black clouds.

"It will be dawn in half an hour," he said. "Hadn't you better go back to your compartment and lie down?"

She shivered, and then suddenly clutched at his hands. Her fingers were icy cold, till he chafed them gently in his.

"I am afraid," she confessed. "All the time I think of what may be next door to me."

"I should try to forget it," he advised. "I wish you would let me bring you a rug or something. You are shivering."

She rose to her feet.

"I will take your advice, and go back," she decided, "but you must come with me. You must stay until it is light. The *convenances* count for nothing at a time like this. It is impossible for me to be alone."

He followed her along the corridor, and they en-

tered the compartment next to where the official remained on guard. They sat down on the edge of the bed, and he wrapped a fur rug, which was hanging behind the door, around her.

"You must not leave me," she insisted. "You will find cigarettes upon the table there. Please light one. Light one for me, too. My fingers tremble so, I cannot."

A magnificent dressing case with fittings of green jade stood upon the table, and he noticed the coronet upon the cigarette case as he opened it and struck a match.

"Go on talking to me, please," she begged, as she puffed feverishly at the cigarette. "Tell me about yourself. Say anything you like, only talk. Tell me who you are, what is your name, and where you are going? I noticed you in the dining car. You were at the same table with—that man."

"My name is Mervyn Amory," he confided, "and I am going to Monte Carlo."

"To gamble?"

"No, to play tennis chiefly."

She repeated his name thoughtfully.

"It is true then, what you are telling me?" she asked. "You are Mervyn Amory, the tennis player?"

"Of course I am," he assured her. "Why should I not tell you the truth? In the restaurant car I thought that you were Italian, but you speak English wonderfully. What is your name?"

"My name is Rosetta di Maureatti," she told him.

"I speak English because, although my father was an Italian, my mother was an American. I have lived in New York, and in London. This is the first time I have ever taken a long journey alone, and it is terrible to have this thing happen."

His lingering mistrust of her was beginning to vanish. He made a bold effort to rid himself of it altogether.

"Tell me," he ventured, "when I went to the next *voiture* to find the attendant, why did you go into my compartment?"

She looked at him with wide-open eyes, in which there lurked no expression save a faint surprise.

"But did I?" she reflected. "I don't remember. I was content to just stumble in anywhere to get away— Oh, I remember now. I hurried out again as soon as I saw your things about. I was not there when you returned. Why do you ask me that question?"

"I don't know," he answered, a little ashamed of himself. "I just happened to see you, and I wondered. Let us try to forget all this for a few minutes. Shall we talk about London? I used to know Savola, the Italian Ambassador."

They discovered mutual acquaintances, and discussed them for some time. The shaft of light in the east grew gradually wider, and suddenly, with scarcely any warning, the fiery preface of the sun threw an orange-coloured film of watery light upon the landscape. The vineyards and fields began to take shape, the cypresses were no longer like dark statues

upon the land. They rushed onwards, towards the far-stretching environs of Marseilles. Some slight remark of hers brought them back to the subject of the tragedy near at hand.

"Tell me," he asked, "I saw that unfortunate man turning around to look at you as though your face was familiar, as though he at least knew who you were. I suppose you did not recognise him?"

She shook her head.

"I thought he was simply being impertinent," she said. "I am well known by sight to many Italians, but he did not seem to me to be the sort of person likely to be amongst my acquaintances. Why do you ask me this? Did he suggest that he knew me?"

"Not at all," Mervyn assured her.

"You talked to him for some time."

"I did my best, being at the same table. He wasn't particularly sociable."

"Did he seem odd to you?" she persisted. "Like a man who was nervous, or who fancied that he was in trouble?"

"He did not take me into his confidence at all," Mervyn replied.

She looked at him curiously for a moment, and then away out of the window. They were progressing more steadily now. The sky was becoming bluer, and flowers were distinguishable in the gardens of the little villas.

"Poor man!" she reflected. "It is terrible that such things happen! It makes one wonder, too. There is

a great deal of unrest in our country. This poor fellow may be one who was plotting against the Government. I am sure that he was an Italian."

"He was an Italian, all right," Mervyn agreed. "He told me so."

"He was perhaps one of the new faction who have become so strong," she ruminated. "You have heard of them, I suppose. The Red Shirts, they call them. Years ago, they were all Communists and Anarchists, the riffraff of the country. Matorni had them shot down like rabbits, whenever there was a rising or riot. No one seemed to mind, because they were really terrible people. Now it is different. Men of education—a great many professional men—have begun to join the party. They say that soon there will be a great struggle, that the rule of Matorni may be questioned. You must hear of these things, Mr. Amory. What do they think of them in England?"

"There is no one in the world," he confessed, "more ignorant of Italian internal politics than I."

"It is tennis which takes all your time then?" she asked, with a faint note of scorn in her tone.

He smiled good-naturedly.

"You must remember," he said, "that politics in our country have become entirely impossible. Ours is the one government to which Matorni points, when he seeks to justify himself. Nothing is done with us except by compromise, and therefore nothing is fully done, no laws are adequately made, every measure that is passed is clipped of a portion of its utility.

I might be more serious-minded if it were worth while; as it is, I pay half my income in taxes, and try to enjoy myself as well as I can with the rest."

The train began to slacken speed. She drew a little closer to him.

"Again I am afraid," she confided.

CHAPTER III

On Marseilles platform there was some natural excitement. The *Chef de Sûreté* himself was waiting there, together with a small company of gendarmes and various officials. The little crowd of spectators was kept back with difficulty, and those passengers of the train who were awake and had heard the news also made their way out on to the platform. After all, though, very little transpired to satisfy their curiosity. A gendarme climbed through the window, unbolted the door of the compartment, and a brief examination was made. Afterwards, everything was sealed up, and it was announced that the body of the dead man was to be taken to Nice, where the whole affair would be dealt with. A couple of gendarmes were left to guard the carriage. No official of any sort attempted to interview Mervyn or his companion, and punctually to the moment, the great train swung out once more on its journey.

"Pretty casual, aren't they?" Mervyn observed.

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"There is Nice to come," she reminded him.

They parted for a time, and met again an hour or so later in the restaurant car. After they had taken their coffee, they returned to his compartment, whilst hers was put in order. With the help of a maid, who had appeared from the far end of the train, she had succeeded in effacing all traces of her disturbed night, and at close quarters Mervyn

appreciated more than ever the simple elegance of her travelling clothes, her jewellery and her few belongings. At her suggestion, he let down the window, and the fresh, sunlit breeze from the Mediterranean swept through the carriage. She drew a deep sigh of content, and threw her hat on to the rack. The wind ruffled her hair and brought swift colour to her cheeks, but she only laughed with the joy of it.

"Now I am happy to be back again," she declared. "Paris, London, what are they compared to this? If only one could forget!" she added, with a sudden gravity. "What time are we due at Nice?"

He told her. She looked at her watch.

"Three more hours!" she reflected. "It is terrible!"

She became suddenly distrait, and he left her for a time. When he returned she had lost all her colour, and there was a curiously startled look in her eyes.

"We are close to Nice," she told him, in an awed whisper.

He nodded.

"There's nothing to worry about," he assured her. "Just a few words with the Chief of the Police there. We really don't know anything about the affair."

She sat with nervously interlocked fingers, waiting for the ordeal which she had apparently begun to dread. A surprise, however, was in store for them. The train came to a standstill outside Nice Station, and their *voiture* was boarded by a little company of men gathered on a temporary platform. They heard the sound of footsteps in the corridor, the opening

and closing of doors, and the train began to move again. They glided forward under the covered roof.

"Rather a good idea," Mervyn remarked quietly. "They have taken the poor fellow away already."

There appeared to be no unusual excitement in Nice Station. A man, however, in the uniform of an official of the police, presented himself at their door soon after the train stopped. He saluted the two deferentially, and glanced at a folded piece of paper he was carrying.

"Signorina la Comtessa Rosetta di Maureatti?" he enquired.

"Yes," the girl answered.

"And Monsieur Mervyn Amory?" he went on, looking at Mervyn.

"My name," the other responded.

"Would you be so kind as to give me your addresses, in case it is necessary to ask you further questions?"

The girl passed him a card.

"The Hôtel de Paris, Monte Carlo," Mervyn confided.

The man saluted, and was on the point of withdrawal. They both looked after him in astonishment.

"Is that all?" Mervyn exclaimed.

"That is the extent of my instructions," the man replied.

The girl leaned forward in her seat. The colour was coming back to her cheeks.

"We answered questions when the train was

stopped," she said. "May we ask you something?"

"At your service, Signorina la Comtessa."

"Who was the man—the man who was killed?"

The official consulted the paper he was carrying.

"Pietro Uguello. He appears to have been a professional man living in Rome."

"There is no doubt, I suppose, that he was murdered?" Mervyn asked.

"Not the slightest," was the confident reply. "He was stabbed to the heart, as he lay in the bed in his pyjamas, by some one who must have entered through the window—probably on leaving Lyons."

"The man was a politician, perhaps?" the girl suggested.

The official shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows? So far as we have been able to discover, there was nothing in his papers of any interest or importance. The Italian Consul has taken possession of them. A search appears to have been made amongst the dead man's belongings, but there is no trace of anything having been removed."

"So the Italian Consul was here when we stopped?" the girl observed thoughtfully.

"He has accompanied the body to the mortuary."

"Will there be an enquiry?" Mervyn asked. "Shall we be summoned to attend it?"

The man shook his head.

"I am not in a position to say exactly, Monsieur," he admitted, "but my opinion is that you will not be troubled."

There was a sudden flash in the girl's eyes.

"One knows what that means," she declared, with a little tremor in her tone. "This is an affair which must be kept secret. Small type in the newspapers, a quick funeral—forgetfulness! There have been other tragedies treated like this."

The official nodded understandingly. The horn blew, and he turned to leave the carriage.

"The Signorina has, in my opinion, correctly defined the situation," he acknowledged. "Italy is a friendly country, having serious internal troubles, and when she expresses a desire, which is in any way reasonable, in connection with one of her own subjects, we grant it."

He saluted them both with ceremony and took his leave. The Comtessa leaned back in her seat and relapsed into a long silence. The relief which Mervyn had expected to find in her face was absent. For a girl of her obvious youth, she seemed tortured by disquieting thoughts. They were crawling now around the curving bays and through the tunnels fringing the sea between Nice and Monte Carlo. She had established herself permanently in Mervyn's compartment, and they sat side by side. The maid, with the assistance of an attendant, was bringing her mistress' hand luggage from its place and arranging it in the corridor.

"Might I suggest," Mervyn said to his companion at last, "that you try to banish, for a time at any rate, the memory of this tragical night? This man

Uguello probably knew the risk he was running."

She turned and looked at him deliberately. Her hand rested upon his arm. She was certainly, he decided, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

"To tell you the truth," she confessed, "I was not thinking about Uguello. I was thinking about you."

"About me?" he exclaimed, startled.

The cool white fingers tightened upon his arm.

"I can guess who Uguello's enemies were," she continued, "and I am terrified to think that, however innocently, you may have become involved in serious trouble."

"But Signorina!" he protested. "Comtessa! How is that possible? I am an Englishman. I know no more about Italian politics than the man in the moon."

"That may be true," she agreed—"I believe, indeed, that it is—yet this is what troubles me. Uguello was probably followed from the house where he has been staying in London to the station. He was watched even to his compartment. You are the only man with whom he was seen to converse upon the train. He visited your compartment afterwards."

"It was a mere matter of travelling civility," Mervyn protested.

"That may have been so," she assented. "I believe that it probably was so. You look honest. I cannot conceive, from the little you can possibly know about Italian domestic affairs, that you, as an Englishman, would be interested in them. I do not believe that Uguello took you into his confidence in any way,

that he could possibly have entrusted you with what his murderer failed to find, but—you are listening, Mr. Amory?"

"Of course I am."

"But," she continued impressively, "if by any chance he did attempt to make use of you, I implore you, for your own sake, to be careful. If you carry with you a verbal message to any one, or a single written line of any sort, place the one in the remotest cell of your memory, and conceal the other in the safest possible place which your ingenuity can suggest. Uguello may have been a patriot, but he had no right to involve a stranger."

"But, Comtessa," Mervyn protested, "reflect for a moment: what could have happened to have induced that poor fellow to hand over his mission, whatever it may have been, to a perfect stranger, in the middle of his journey?"

"Just this," she explained. "It happens that I know a little more about the situation than I can reveal. Uguello knew well enough—he must have known—that his mission, from the first, was a dangerous one, and he must also have known, from the moment he entered the restaurant car, and saw Torrita of the Italian Secret Service—the hook-nosed man with the black beard—within a few feet of him, that the game was up. That is why it seems to me, as I fear it may seem to them, that by passing his mission on to you, even though you were a complete stranger, there was a faint chance, after all, of his

papers reaching their destination. He had nothing to lose. The Cause might gain."

"Comtessa," he asked, "why do you go out of your way to tell me these things, to warn me so fervently?"

Her smile was a revelation to him. The clouds seemed to be passing.

"Because I rather like you," she confided. "You have been kind and considerate, and I should hate anything to happen to you just because you had become an innocent participator in these wretched intrigues. Remember, you can do no good to any one by attempting to carry out Uguello's mission, unless he has been able to suggest some means by which you could do so with perfect safety. It would be certain —absolutely certain—death, for you to attempt to cross the frontier with the papers which Uguello was probably carrying, in your possession. This is not a threat; it is just what you would call 'the writing on the wall.'"

They had left Monaco and were crawling towards Monte Carlo. He leaned towards her.

"Comtessa," he pointed out, "look at my six tennis racquets in the rack. Do I seem to you a man likely to thrust himself into the policy and intrigues of a nation in which he has not the slightest interest?"

"I agree," she admitted. "You have not in the least that air. Nevertheless, I choose to warn you."

"And I am grateful," he acknowledged, rising reluctantly to his feet as the train slowed up, "because

I like to think that you have taken that much interest in me. Au revoir, Comtessa."

She laughed up into his face.

"But I too," she told him, "alight here at Monte Carlo."

CHAPTER IV

The umpire, seated on his high stool, which overlooked the centre court at La Festa, relieved at the thought of his imminent release, leaned down and called the score.

"Two sets—love. Five games to two. Amory leads."

There was a moment's pause. Then Amory, serving, tossed the ball into the air, and the scorer's monotonous voice continued.

"Fifteen—love. Fifteen—all. Thirty—fifteen. Forty—fifteen. Game, set and match to Amory. Three sets to love."

Amory walked up to the net and shook hands with his defeated opponent, a flaxen-haired Teuton, who had been, from the first, completely outclassed.

"Good game, Von Grezzner," he said, without any particular enthusiasm. "The luck went my way."

Von Grezzner, a little depressed by his overwhelming defeat, shrugged his shoulders.

"It was your service," he acknowledged. "Too good for me. I could not take. You will give me another game some day, yes?"

"With pleasure," Amory acquiesced politely, as he turned away.

The secretary—a Colonel Fenton—strolled out from the pavilion.

"Good work, Amory," he greeted him. "I can't think why Von Grezzner enters for these singles. He

hasn't an earthly chance. Wants to show his friendliness, I suppose. By-the-by, Lord Bremner's here—just arrived by car, I think. He's asking for you."

A short, grey-haired man, clean-shaven, wearing sun glasses, and dressed with almost meticulous care, rose from his seat and held out his hand.

"Hullo, Mervyn!" he exclaimed. "Putting it across 'em again, eh?"

"Not much of a game, I'm afraid," Mervyn deprecated. "I didn't know you were coming out, sir."

Bremner took off his glasses, and looked around him, up at the blue sky, and around the sunshine-flooded courts, with an air of ecstasy.

"A fortnight's rain, and three weeks' fog!" he observed, with a grimace. "Couldn't stick it any longer. Why should you lads have all the good things of the world, eh? The political horizon, as the *Times* declares, is clear—the only horizon which is clear in England, I can assure you—so I played truant! How long have you been here, young fellow?"

"About a fortnight," Mervyn replied. "Fine weather all the time."

"You'll have to find me some tennis."

"Delighted, sir," Mervyn acquiesced. "We'll enter for the doubles together, if you like. The Colonel will find us some victims to practise on."

"Certainly," the secretary assented. "In the meantime, Amory, if Lord Bremner will excuse us for a minute, there is a lady here I want to present you to—The Princess di Panini."

"See you later, Mervyn! Dine with me to-night, if you are doing nothing," Bremner invited.

"With pleasure, sir.—Who is the Princess di Panini?" Mervyn enquired, as the secretary led him away.

"The most beautiful woman in Italy," was the enthusiastic reply. "You must have heard of her. She is the great friend of the Duce. The girl with her is a young relative—the Comtessa di Maurcatti."

Mervyn felt a sudden access of interest in the impending enterprise. He walked almost eagerly to where the two women were seated. Colonel Fenton murmured a few words of introduction, and Mervyn bent low over the fingers of the Princess. Then he turned with delight to receive the greeting of her companion.

"At last!" the latter exclaimed. "Do you know that we have been here for nearly a fortnight without meeting?"

"It has been my misfortune," Mervyn declared, with profound self-commiseration.

"But where have you hidden yourself?" the girl demanded. "This place is so small."

Mervyn pointed with an apologetic gesture to the courts.

"I was so much out of practice," he explained, "and the tournament is next week. I'm afraid I have spent most of my time up here."

The Princess, who had been bidding adieu to a friend, turned once more towards Mervyn. He real-

ised at once the justice of Colonel Fenton's commendation. The Princess was of a different type to her companion, but it was difficult to conceive a more beautiful face. Her features were soft, yet classical, her hair, wine colour, her eyes, within their delicate fringe of eyelashes, the deepest shade of blue. She smiled entrancingly at Mervyn. Her English was very correct, but a little hesitating.

"I was so anxious," she said, "to thank you for your great kindness to my cousin on the journey from Paris. She has spoken of you so often."

"I was very happy to be of any service," Mervyn murmured. "We certainly had rather an adventurous time."

"Ah, that poor man!" The Princess sighed. "It was so sad, and so very terrifying. I feel that I can never be grateful enough to you for your kindness to Rosetta. It is the first time that she has travelled without a chaperon. One does not imagine the possibility of such happenings, or I should have provided an escort."

"Mr. Amory did very well," Rosetta declared. "If ever I travel again in a train where a crime is committed, I shall ask to be protected by an Englishman with a case of tennis racquets."

"Is that sarcasm?" Mervyn enquired pleasantly.

"Not in the least," Rosetta insisted. "Still, I am quite sure that the reason no one asked us any unpleasant questions was because you were what you were."

The Princess looked up from under her parasol.

"Mr. Amory," she told him, "I have taken for a time the Château de Roquebrune, at Cap Martin. You will pay us a visit, yes?"

"I shall be delighted," Mervyn assented gratefully.

"You will lunch to-morrow, perhaps, at half-past twelve. It may be that you will find only us two women. I cannot tell. Rosetta, however, will be very happy to see you again."

"With the greatest pleasure," Mervyn accepted.

A thin, short man, with a hooked nose and black beard was approaching the little group. The Princess' nod to Mervyn was one of dismissal. He made his adieux and departed. Colonel Fenton hailed him at the entrance to the pavilion.

"Bremner's just gone," he announced; "I've got him a game for this afternoon. He asked for a rabbits' foursome to start with. Are you off now?"

"I think I'll go back and change."

Fenton accompanied him towards the gates.

"My courts," he remarked, "are earning a new reputation. One might almost have held a European Conference here this morning. There's the Princess who, through Matorni, represents Italy as completely as any Italian statesman could, the Right Honourable Lord Bremner, English Cabinet Minister, Monsieur le Général de Parnouste, who used to be Chief of the Staff of the French Army,

and your late opponent, the Baron von Grezzner."

"Is Von Grezzner a politician?" Mervyn enquired idly.

"I fancy so. He was one of Hindenburg's protégés. Pretty interesting crowd, isn't it?"

Mervyn nodded assent.

"And even now," he remarked, "you haven't mentioned one of the most important men here, in his way?"

"Who's that?"

"The man talking to the Princess. You don't know who it is?"

The Colonel shook his head.

"I've seen him up here once or twice. He's a member, but I've even forgotten his name."

"That is Signor Torrita, Chief of Matorni's famous Secret Police," Mervyn confided.

"That little man with the hooked nose!" the Colonel remarked, not much impressed.

Mervyn smiled.

"I am not well up in these matters myself," he admitted, "but you've only to mention his name to an Italian, and, metaphorically speaking, he crosses himself. They say that he can have a man shot on sight, without trial or evidence. He has more power, in fact, over life and death, than any one since the Inquisition."

Colonel Fenton chuckled.

"I must certainly add him to my gallery of celebrities," he declared.

Rosetta had watched Mervyn's departing figure until he had disappeared through the gates. The Princess, noticing her absorption, smiled.

"You interest yourself in that young man, Rosetta?" she asked. "He is good to look at, but not, I should have thought, your type."

"He has succeeded," Rosetta confessed, "in piquing my curiosity."

"Tell me, my dear, in what way?" the Princess begged. "To me, notwithstanding the many excellent qualities which he no doubt possesses, he scarcely seems intriguing."

"Nor would he ever have seemed so to me, I dare say," Rosetta admitted, "except that the first time I saw him he shared a table in the restaurant of the Blue Train with Uguello."

The Princess raised her eyebrows.

"An accident probably," she murmured. "In a crowded car such things may happen."

"Naturally," Rosetta agreed. "Still, whenever I travel, it amuses me to notice people, and I noticed this: the young Englishman endeavoured, good-naturedly enough, to make conversation. Uguello at first repulsed him. Afterwards, however, he lingered until the Englishman left. They walked the whole length of the train together, and Uguello, instead of going to his own compartment, entered the Englishman's."

"Is it of any consequence?" the Princess asked.

"I suppose not," Rosetta replied, "yet, as Tor-

rita knows all this, I was wondering whether he had attached any significance to it. You see, Torrita might argue this way. There is no doubt that Uguello had recognized him and must have realised that he was in imminent danger. He must have known the danger he was in when he left the restaurant car. He may have thought to himself that any chance was worth taking."

The Princess smiled.

"My child," she remonstrated, "I don't believe that such an idea has entered into Torrita's head. You yourself cannot believe that Uguello would have parted with papers for which he had risked his life to a young man whom he had met for the first time upon the train?"

"Naturally I do not believe it," Rosetta agreed; "in fact, the idea seems to me ridiculous. Yet, you tell me that the papers were not found, and Torrita, for some reason or other, remains in Monte Carlo."

"The papers were certainly not recovered," the Princess acquiesced. "Matorni is furious about it, but there are many other reasons why Torrita should stay here."

Rosetta nodded thoughtfully.

"I think that I am very foolish," she admitted. "As you know, I am not so interested as I ought to be in politics, but the young man was very kind to me, and I am quite sure he would never have understood the danger of even exchanging a few words

with a man like Uguello. Torrita would suspect his own grandmother if he had one."

The Princess patted her on the hand.

"My dear child," she assured her, "I am perfectly certain that Torrita has not an idea in his head concerning your young man.—Sometimes I can't help wishing, Rosetta, that you would take life—our Italian life—a little more seriously. You speak of 'politics.' What a word! These things which are happening around us are the blood and soul of our country."

"Your country more than mine," Rosetta reminded her. "You live in a world so great, Lucilla, that it would terrify me even to peer across the threshold. Does it give you all that you wish for in life? Sometimes I wonder."

The face of the Princess was like the face of a saint murmuring a prayer.

"It gives me Matorni."

"A great devotion to one man!"

"There is only one Matorni."

Rosetta looked at her cousin curiously.

"Is he so wonderful a lover?"

The Princess rose to her feet. There were people moving around, and she waited until they were out of earshot.

"Come, Rosetta," she enjoined, "the car will be waiting, and we have seen your bucolic young man play tennis, which I suspect is why you brought me here. As for Matorni," she added, dropping her

voice a little, "we do not talk of him any more, if you please, even though this is not Italy. I think it never wise even to breathe his name in a public place."

"Frightened of your own lover!" Rosetta smiled.

"Fear is not the word where one loves," the Princess replied. "I may fear, though, what he represents.—Von Grezzner lunches to-day, but it will be better if we do not wait for him. This place begins to have the air of Geneva."

"Better, too, that we do not discuss tennis at luncheon," Rosetta observed.

The Princess smiled faintly.

"I think," she said, "that the Baron makes use of sport only as a means to an end. In any case, he will have graver matters to discuss."

CHAPTER V

The Baron von Grezzner, having carefully watched the departure of his prospective hostesses from the tennis courts, emerged from the dressing rooms, summoned a little carriage, and directed the man to drive him to the Château de Roquebrune. Neither in dress nor appearance did he make any effort to conceal his nationality. He was, in fact, the perfect embodiment of the well-fed, good-humoured and good-natured Teuton, unburdened with a superabundance of brains, spruce, well-groomed, and easy-living. His face was round, his complexion florid, his figure a little stout, but remarkably well set up. His lips seemed to be always hovering around a smile. His eyeglass was a rigidly fixed appurtenance. He had abandoned the German style of short hair of the more militant type of his nationality and wore it brushed smoothly back in flaxen profusion. He lit a cigarette, as his carriage climbed the hill, and hummed a tune to himself. He was still humming it when he was ushered into the château, and out on to the beautiful Bougainvillea-embowered loggia. He only left off to greet his hostess with apparent ecstasy.

"This," he declared, "is amazing. This is my greatest happiness of recent years. Princess, it is a sad truth that you grow more beautiful."

"Why sad?" she asked.

"Sad for those of us who are privileged to see you so seldom."

"Be grateful for what happens," she smiled. "Are you not lunching with us?"

"I do not need to be reminded of my present joys," he sighed.

A footman brought out cocktails. The Baron disposed of two with much appreciation.

"Luncheon will be served," his hostess told him, "in ten minutes. My cousin, the Comtessa, is with me, of course. If you would like to see the view of which we are so proud we have just time."

The Baron murmured his delight, and the Princess, holding a tiny parasol over her uncovered head, walked by his side down a long rose pergola, across the lawns for which the château was famous, to a small temple which stood facing the sea. The Baron paused before he followed his guide inside. He stood for a moment gazing around in voluble admiration of the view. One might have imagined, however, that he was also making quite sure that there were no loiterers in the garden. In due course he, too, entered the arbour, and stood looking down upon the Mediterranean.

"It is magnificent!" he exclaimed. "It is a little corner of heaven, this!"

"Do you know, my friend, that I very nearly put off our luncheon," the Princess said, a little abruptly.

"But why?"

"It was Torrita's advice," she confided. "If you come to think of it, it is curious how many people there are in Monte Carlo just now who might be interested in your visits here. There is Milord Bremner, the English Cabinet Minister, whom Matorni speaks of much more respectfully than of most English politicians, Général de Parnouste, the French ex-Chief of Staff, and Admiral Ledoux, who commands the Toulon squadron. Torrita, I fancy, has his suspicions of this place. He is badly wanted in Rome, but he remains here for a few more days."

Von Grezzner's smile had disappeared. His expression was almost grim.

"Then we will lose no time," he said. "The chief reason I begged for this interview, Princess, was to ask you this: Has Torrita arrived at any decision with regard to the disappearance of the papers which Uguello was known to have been carrying?"

"None whatever," the Princess admitted. "Uguello spent the last twelve hours in London surrounded by our people. Our very cleverest man, in whom Torrita has every confidence, is willing to stake his life that Uguello boarded the Blue Train with the papers which he received in Berlin sewn into his vest. Everything was done according to plan, as you know, yet when he was searched after he had been dealt with near Lyons, the stitches were still there in his vest, but the papers had gone."

"And on the train?"

"He spoke only to an Englishman—the young

man you were playing tennis with this morning—Mervyn Amory."

"That babe-faced fool!" the Baron explained contemptuously. "Why, he's here every season. He is a typical Englishman. He thinks of nothing but his games."

The Princess did not respond. All the time the Baron watched her.

"You think otherwise?" he asked suddenly.

"I would not go so far as that," she replied. "I only let my thought dwell upon him at all because Uguello did not exchange a single word with any one else upon the train."

Von Grezzner ruminated.

"I have never yet met an Englishman," he observed, "having to do with the Secret Service who was able to present an inoffensive and unsuspicious appearance. If ever a man looked a brainless idiot, Amory does."

"Nevertheless," the Princess insisted drily, "he is being watched. To-morrow he lunches here. I shall drop him a hint for his own good."

"Supposing," the Baron suggested, "that he really did have the papers from Uguello, surely he would not have the slightest idea how to make any practical use of them. You know what Uguello's intention was. He was calling secret meetings of the Red Shirts in every town of Italy, and having a copy of Matorni's plans and our agreement laid before them. He hadn't the slightest intention of

tinkering with France and England. It was Matorni's downfall he aimed at, and there is no doubt that if he could have got in first with his information, there would have been a terrible rising of the Red Shirts throughout the country."

"That may have been his intention," the Princess reflected, "but we can never be sure. You know what Matorni is? A man of swift decisions, and with the courage of a lion. A word of this, and he would have had the leaders of the Red Shirts shot in every town throughout Italy."

"But it is Fascism, Matorni himself, and his complete autocracy that the Red Shirts wish to destroy," the Baron argued. "They don't want to embroil Italy with other nations."

"First and before everything," the Princess pointed out firmly, "what they desired was to stop the war. If that arrives, a hundred thousand Red Shirts will be called to the Colours, and will come under martial law. Frankly, I believe if Uguello had doubted his getting through to Italy, he would have disobeyed his orders and paid a call in Downing Street."

The German was very much disturbed. He walked the length of the little arbour and back again. He looked out across the Mediterranean, but he no longer went into ecstasies about the view.

"Princess," he said at last, "the situation is serious. "We have to remember one thing, though. This is the fourteenth day since Uguello's death. So far,

I think we may safely say that there has not been the slightest indication in Rome, Paris or London, of any leakage. If those papers had fallen into dangerous hands, should we not have heard of it before now?"

"That seems reasonable," the Princess acquiesced, "yet fourteen days is not a very long time. Torrita, I am sure, is uneasy. He says little to me, but I am certain that he has suspicions of a sort. Matorni is needing him badly in Rome, but he declines to leave this place. He is convinced that unless they were destroyed, the papers Uguello was carrying are in Monte Carlo."

"How does he arrive at that conclusion?" the Baron enquired.

"No one left the train at Marseilles," the Princess replied. "Torrita had, altogether, fourteen men watching, and the platforms were guarded with the utmost care. At Nice, Torrita has already satisfied himself as to every person who left the train. At Cannes there were only two—the English chaplain, and an American spinster. At the Italian frontier, every passenger was searched. There was trouble about it, of course, but Torrita has absolute powers, and he used them. You see, there remains only Monte Carlo. There were nineteen people who descended there, and not one of them came within half a dozen yards of Uguello after the train had left Calais—always excepting the young man Amory."

"Of him," the Baron declared with conviction, "I

have no fear whatsoever. For four years I have known him here. He plays tennis morning and afternoon. He talks tennis at night, and he dreams of it in his sleep. He gambles very little. He goes to the dancing places scarcely at all. He lives for his sport and his health. It is not of such stuff that the dangerous adventurers of the world are made."

In the distance a luncheon gong was making melodious music. The Princess laid her hand upon her companion's arm.

"Well, my friend," she decided, "for a time we will forget our perplexities."

The Baron knew all about his hostess' chef, and he smiled.

"We will forget them very pleasantly," he declared.

CHAPTER VI

The Right Honourable Charles, Lord Bremner, whose visit to Monte Carlo had been undertaken at the urgent request of the Prime Minister, devoted a portion of the remainder of the day of his arrival to judicious camouflage. He lunched at the Hôtel de Paris, with some friends whom he had met on the tennis courts, played two sets of tennis in the afternoon, arranged for him by the secretary, took out his card, and gambled with the utmost seriousness until seven o'clock at the Sporting Club. It was not until a quarter to eight that he sent a waiter round with his compliments to enquire whether Mr. Amory would take a cocktail with him in his sitting room before dinner. Mervyn, accepting the invitation without apparent enthusiasm, presently descended to the second floor of the hotel and made his diffident appearance in the Cabinet Minister's suite.

"All right to come here, was it, sir?" he asked, as the waiter ushered him in. "I understood we were to meet in the lounge."

"To tell you the truth," Bremner replied, "I forgot what time we said, and I didn't want to keep you waiting. Help yourself to a cigarette—Sullivan's, fresh from London yesterday. I must tell you about my tennis."

The waiter who had brought the cocktails disappeared, closing the door. Mervyn made a little grimace.

"Seems rather rot, this sort of thing, sir," he said, "but as a matter of fact one can't be too careful here. This hotel is a perfect hotbed of spies. Besides, there is not the slightest doubt that I am being watched. That's why I thought it better to keep out of your way until this evening."

"Quite right, Mervyn," Bremner agreed. "As you say, one can't be too careful in these feverish times. All the same, we're on French soil, aren't we? This is a French hotel, for instance, isn't it?"

"Yes, but the trouble is," Mervyn pointed out, "that half the employees are Italian. They say the Italians are rotten colonists, but they are very hard to dig out of a place where they have once got a hold; Nice, for example, even to-day, is more Italian than French, so far as regards the working population, and at some of the old towns along the coast, like Cagnes, there is scarcely a person whose French you can understand. They are traditionally Italian, and the Italians are the sort of nation with whom tradition never dies."

"You've made a study of these things apparently," Bremner remarked, sipping his cocktail.

"I can't say that exactly, sir," Mervyn rejoined, "but the present situation gives one to think, doesn't it?"

"It does indeed. I quite appreciate your caution, Mervyn, but so long as we are together for a few minutes, without advertising the fact, let's talk. Tell me how you became possessed of this information

which has thrown us all into such a panic. I thought you came out here really to form a sort of receiving house between Rome and London, just to make weekly reports upon the situation as it presented itself to you here, from both points of view—I mean the French and Italian, of course."

"Quite true, sir," Mervyn assented. "That was the idea, and I thought, to tell you the truth, that I was in for rather a dull time. What happened though was that I tumbled into a queer sort of adventure on the way out."

Bremner nodded.

"You were in the train at the time that Uguello was murdered?"

"I sat at the same table in the restaurant car," Mervyn confided. "I hadn't the least idea who he was, but from the moment I saw him, I could tell that he was either grievously ill or in desperate straits. Then I recognised Torrita, and I knew that there must be something up."

"Who is Torrita?" Bremner asked. "The name sounds familiar to me, but you must remember that I'm not in your line altogether."

"Torrita," Mervyn replied, "is the Chief of the Secret Police of Italy. What that really means is that he is Matorni's watchman, his chief spy, executioner, or whatever you like to call it. Italy, as you know, has left off even claiming to be considered a constitutionally governed country. Matorni is supreme—an absolute autocrat. Torrita, with a

thousand spies working under him, has only to put a cross against a man's name, and he is dead the next day. What chance had poor Uguello when he saw Torrita within a few feet of him in the train, and knew that he never travelled without half a dozen of his henchmen close at hand? He knew perfectly well, when he left the restaurant car, that they never meant him to leave the train alive."

"But where exactly did you come into it?"

Mervyn, in response to a gesture from his host, helped himself to another cocktail.

"You see, it was like this, sir," he explained. "Uguello had been sent by the Red Shirts to Germany and to London, to collect proofs of Matorni's great scheme, and of his dealings with Germany. He was to bring these proofs back to Milan, and there was to be a simultaneous exploitation of them amongst the whole of the Red Shirt centres in Italy. The scheme was excellent, so far as it went, but Torrita's spies were too many and too well informed. Uguello never had a chance of getting back to Italy. He realised that in the train. Sewn into his vest he had documents which, if they could have been emblazoned upon the sky for all Italy to have seen, would have meant the end of Matorni and all his wild schemes. Unfortunately, Uguello realised that by no human power would he succeed in reaching the frontier. What was he to do? The idea must have come into his mind when I tried to talk to him. He looked upon me as an absolutely harmless,

simple-minded young Englishman whom no one would suspect, and he handed over his reports to me. An hour or so later he was murdered."

"You certainly tumbled into things," Bremner remarked thoughtfully. "The papers, so I understand, were entrusted to you to pass on to some one in Italy."

Mervyn's face suddenly seemed to have grown older and harder. The blue of his eyes was steely. His clean-shaven mouth was set in rigid lines.

"I am the servant of my country," he said quietly. "You know as well as I do, sir, the code which prevails amongst our Secret Service—the code which must prevail, I imagine, in any Secret Service in the world. One has to abandon conscience and one's personal sense of honour. One's country, and her good, become the Alpha and the Omega of one's life."

"Quite right, young man," Bremner approved. "Go on. You must not regard anything I say in the light of criticism. My job here is to understand."

"Quite so, sir. Very well, then. I got the packet through all right, melted the seal, transcribed the notes, and forwarded them to London."

Bremner smiled reminiscently.

"And a pretty stir they made, I can tell you," he confided. "You gave the Foreign Office the busiest hour it's had since the war."

"There has been nothing of the sort mooted since the war," Mervyn agreed. "Matorni is the only man

who could have conceived such a scheme, and few people would have imagined him capable of it. Anyhow, that's my story. I needn't tell you, sir, that I didn't communicate with Paris in any shape or form. I still have the original documents, and if an accredited ambassador from amongst Uguello's party comes for them, I intend to let him have them. That much, at least, I think I owe to the keeping of my trust."

Bremner was noncommittal. He contented himself with a short nod.

"I can tell you this, Mervyn," he said. "You must be interested, and naturally you have a right to know. We sent a messenger over to Paris by aeroplane the next day. We decided upon that course unanimously. France is still, to a certain extent, our ally, and she had a right to the facts."

"Are you able to tell me what our line is likely to be, sir?" Mervyn enquired.

Bremner sighed.

"Our attitude is not necessarily one of volition," he answered; "it is one of necessity. We are in no position to go to war with any one about anything. It is a humiliating situation, but there it is. Fortunately our technical obligations do not commit us—"

The telephone bell at his elbow rang sharply. Bremner picked up the receiver and listened.

"You can show Monsieur le Général up," he directed. "Some fresh development, I suppose," he added, turning to Mervyn, after having carefully

replaced the receiver. "The French General, De Parnouste, is here. I knew he was somewhere in the neighbourhood. They sent him down the day they received our despatches."

Mervyn smiled.

"He came down well camouflaged," he remarked. "He brought a little French actress, two motor cars, his tennis racquets and golf clubs, and has been gambling at the Sporting Club every night as though nothing else in the world interested him. Our fellows don't trouble to do the thing so completely as that."

"He is a perfect wonder," Bremner declared enthusiastically. "I knew all that. I also know that yesterday morning, from four o'clock until half-past six, he was on the upper Corniche, examining the gun situations."

There was a knock at the outer door of the suite, a quick step across the little hall, and a page boy threw open the door. Général de Parnouste, after a lightning glance at Mervyn, advanced with outstretched hands to Bremner.

"My dear friend," he said, "I trust that I do not disturb you. It approaches your dinner hour, I know, but I found myself in the hotel, and I thought it would be a pleasure to take an *apéritif* with you."

"Nothing could be more agreeable to me," Bremner replied hospitably. "As it chances, too, there need be no delay. Our cocktail shaker is half full, and we even have glasses. Permit me. Mervyn, let

me fill your glass too. I shall ask your leave, General, to present my nephew, Mr. Mervyn Amory."

The General shook hands cordially.

"We have met upon the tennis courts," he remarked, "although I am not, alas, in such a distinguished class of the game."

Bremner lowered his voice a little.

"Our young friend here," he confided, "has another interest in life besides sport. He has been connected with one of the departments of our Foreign Office since the war, and it is entirely owing to his efforts that those despatches reached you at the Quai d'Orsay last week."

The General threw out his hands—a typically French gesture of astonishment.

"You English are really wonderful people," he confessed. "I have known Mr. Amory by sight and by reputation for years, and he is the last person I should ever have suspected of such interests. Under the circumstances I may speak. I have news—serious news."

"You may speak freely," Bremner assured him. "No one has a better right to know what is happening than my nephew."

"This morning at five o'clock," the General recounted, "two Italian spies were discovered sketching our Fort Number Three, above La Turbie—the one which commands the Corniche Road beyond the village, and which is fitted with our new guns. They got out of the place and raced for their cars. The

sentries, however, had given the alarm; we had no automobile at hand equal in speed to theirs, and, as the frontier was so close, we adopted extreme measures. One of the machine guns we have established there, masked for that purpose, was turned upon them at once."

"It was necessary?" Bremner asked, a little doubtfully.

"It was entirely justifiable," was the blunt reply. "They might otherwise have escaped with the plans. As it is, they are both dead, their bodies lying in the Mairie at La Turbie, and with them the evidence of their guilt. I have despatched an aviator to Paris, and we are awaiting instructions."

"What about their passports?" Mervyn enquired.

"Quite in order. They were both Italian officers of senior rank, belonging to the Thirteenth Artillery Corps."

"Machiello was one of them, perhaps?" Mervyn suggested, with a sudden start.

"Pietro Machiello was one," the General acknowledged. "He has been staying for a month at an hotel in the Condamine, playing tennis in the daytime, and spying at night."

"I was drawn to play against him to-morrow," Mervyn confided.

The Frenchman drew himself up and smiled grimly.

"He will never wield a racquet again," he said. "A brave man, perhaps, although of a detestable

profession. There are seventeen bullets in his body at the present moment."

"Has the Italian Consul here been notified?" Bremner enquired.

The General, who had been listening intently, held up his finger. He moved towards the door, and on the threshold met a waiter entering with a tray of glasses.

"I see another gentleman arrive," he explained beamingly. "Would Milord like more cocktails made?"

"I think there are enough in the shaker. Fill up the gentlemen's glasses.—Why don't you stay and dine with us, General."

"You are very kind," the latter replied. "I have an engagement, or I should have been delighted. As you are aware," he added, looking across at the waiter as he rolled a cigarette, "I am on the retired list now, with nothing to do but amuse myself for the last few years of my life. I am devoting myself to that pursuit. Hence it is Madame who waits."

The *garçon* took his leave. The General remained silent until the outside door was closed.

"Even that fellow is an Italian," he pointed out. "They can't all be spies, of course, but you always find some one at your elbow in this place. No, Lord Bremner," he went on, "we have made no report to any one except headquarters at Paris. We are a little tired of incidents. The law as regards a spy who is caught red-handed is pretty well universal.

We should never consent to an enquiry, military or otherwise. I am reporting the circumstances to you, unofficially, for a reason at which I expect you can guess.—My apologies. I have a short distance to go, and Madame, who thinks nothing of being an hour late for *déjeuner*, is an extraordinarily punctual person at dinner time."

The General withdrew, and the other two, after a suitable interval, followed him downstairs into the restaurant. The place as usual was crowded, the music, if anything, a little too insistent, the hum of conversation unceasing. There were representatives at the various tables of every nationality in the world —every nationality and every class of society. The most famous variety artist in Europe, escorted by a Roumanian prince, divided Bremner and Mervyn from an English duchess and her Italian husband. A little farther away were seated an American multimillionaire and his family; behind, a party of Chilcans, one of whom was reported to have won a million francs the day before.

"An English Cabinet Minister," Bremner remarked good-naturedly, "makes no sort of a show here. All the same," he added, dropping his voice, "a word from one of us, and I wonder how many people would be left in this hotel in a week's time?"

"Things could scarcely move as quickly as that, sir?" Mervyn queried.

"There could be no actual fighting so soon, of course," Bremner admitted, "but look at that ter-

rible single railway line. The whole of the rolling stock on both sides of the frontier would naturally be commandeered, and the Upper and Middle Corniche roads would certainly be closed to civilians. War in these parts would be a terrible thing. Neither side would wish to damage Monte Carlo, but on the other hand there would certainly be fierce fighting for La Turbie, and the railways would naturally be shelled from the sea by the fleet which held the ascendancy for the moment."

The manager of the hotel—a person of great consequence—who would probably have fainted upon the spot if he had overhead the conversation between the two men, paused to pay his respects. Bremner presented his compliments upon the cosmopolitan appearance of the room. Monsieur Deuillet beamed his satisfaction.

"Now indeed," he assented, "the time has arrived when one realises that war is a thing of the past. See, we have here in my restaurant, you, Lord Bremner, a Cabinet Minister of your country; Baron von Grezzner, who is in the German Reichstag, and has, I believe, a portfolio; Général de Parnouste, once Chief of the Staff of the French Army; an Italian Admiral, whose name I have not heard, and many other notable people—all together here with no other thought save that of pleasure. It is now indeed that one appreciates the wonderful joys of peace."

He passed on with a little bow. The *sommelier*

had just filled their glasses, and Bremner raised his thoughtfully.

"We will drink a toast, Mervyn," he suggested, "to the continuance of peace."

They were in the act of drinking when, without the slightest warning, there was an explosion which seemed almost to shake the room. Every one started. Those who were nearest the windows left their places to look out. The glasses and cutlery upon the tables rattled. The walls themselves seemed to tremble. The manager looked back from the threshold of the room with a reassuring smile.

"The Fête Day of the Prince of Monaco," he reminded them. "It is the gun which signals the fireworks."

The explanation was generally received with laughter and instant forgetfulness, but to Bremner and Mervyn Amory it seemed a strange punctuation of their talk. They drank their toast, but in silence. Bremner leaned back in his chair and stared out of the high window to where the lights of La Turbie mingled with the stars.

"If one were superstitious," he murmured, "that would be a displeasing reminiscence."

CHAPTER VII

The residents of Monte Carlo, whose windows commanded a view of the port, received a surprise when they awoke on the following morning. A small Italian cruiser had entered the harbour in the night, and lay in the centre of the basin. Her visit appeared to have been unexpected by the maritime authorities, for the usual civilities were unexchanged. At nine o'clock a closed motor car was driven rapidly along the quay to where a small pinnace manned by Italian sailors had been waiting for over an hour. The Princess di Panini, recognised by a few of the loiterers, descended from the car and hastily embarked. Some minutes later she was received by the Commander in full uniform, assisted up a carpeted gangway, and escorted to a cabin on the lower deck, at the door of which two sentries with naked bayonets were standing. There was the quick interchange of a pass word, and the door was opened and closed once more to the outside world. A tall man in civilian clothes came hastily from an inner room, his arms outstretched.

"Lucilla!"

"Antonio!"

They stood for a minute locked in each other's arms. Then she drew away. There were tears in her eyes, but they were the shining tears of joy.

"Please explain," she begged. "How was this possible? I had no word."

"I ached for you," he answered, "and the man in me triumphed. Lucilla, you grow more beautiful every day."

She laughed happily.

"And you, my dear, so tired and yet so wonderful," she murmured, smoothing his hair.

He led her to a couch and stood over her—a tall, thin, but finely shaped man, so lean in the face that his cheeks were almost hollow. All his features were carved with deep lines. In his eyes was the brightness of genius. The black hair brushed back from his high forehead was faintly streaked with grey, but his whole frame seemed to exude vigour and vitality.

"Nothing that ever happened in the world is so amazing as this!" she cried, seizing his hands.

"It is simple enough," he assured her. "I was two days at Genoa, and Genoa, after all, is not so far away. There was the memorial and the address I promised to deliver two months ago. Our fastest cruiser was in the harbour. The temptation was irresistible. I laid my finger upon the mouth of the press, and we dashed for here. By midday we will be headed for Civita Vecchia."

"My wonderful Antonio!" she whispered.

He leaned towards her opened arms, the time passed by, they were cut off from the world. Their isolation, guarded by those sentries with the naked bayonets, was as profound as the gods could grant.—

Outside, the Principality awoke to the joy of a

wonderful spring morning. The sun mounted higher in the heavens. A little crowd upon the quay watched the departure of a popular yacht, lines of people leaning over the railings at the top gazed at the long, sinister-looking war machine, the latest of her type, lying below, bristling with guns and flying the Italian flag. Not one of them dreamed that behind her steel walls she guarded one of the love romances of the world.

"An hour of your visit gone," he said at last. "How selfish I am.—You will take some coffee."

He touched a bell. Coffee, fruit and a flask of wine were brought almost at once. And again their solitude was sealed.

"I come," he confided with a smile, "like Nero to the caves of Sybil. Tell me my fortune, Lucilla. What do people say of my country's new attitude towards these continual frontier incidents? Has any one the vision to see whither they are leading?"

She passed her arm through his.

"Antonio," she confessed, "sometimes I wish that this last great dream of yours had been slower of birth. Sometimes I am afraid."

He smiled at her tenderly.

"What fear need you have, sweetheart?" he asked. "You have seen how my army has grown during the last ten years. You, more than any one, realise its new spirit, which has come with the triumph of our creed. France is a weary country, weary of bloodshed, and—mark you, this is the most poignant

thing of all—France is to-day a country without ideals. Her people have no high standards of life. She moves forward towards the material things. She lacks inspiration. She is tired, as my people too were tired, but we have been born again in a new faith and a new religion. We are invincible, Lucilla, unconquerable! You do not doubt me?"

"I doubt nothing that you say, Antonio," she assured him, clinging more closely to his arm; "but you are one man."

"Rienzi was one man," he retorted; "Cæsar was one man; Napoleon was one man. It is by one man alone that a country can be saved and governed. Do I need to ask you to recall what I have made of Italy?"

"I am only a woman, remember," she went on. "These attacks upon your life—they frighten me. The last one—how you ever escaped, God knows."

"It is God who does know," he answered reverently. "Don't you think that if it were meant that I should be killed by the hands of an assassin, I should have been dead months and years ago? I have grown to the great faith. I believe in my destiny. I now look at the dagger of the would-be murderer or down the barrel of the pistol with a calm which I used to affect. To-day it is a real tranquillity. Fear is an unknown quantity in my life. Nothing will happen to me until Italy has regained her former greatness. Each day my plans mature more surely. My council of generals is unanimous. There is no possible

movement of French troops which could counter our attacks. Look up at La Turbie from your villa windows this afternoon. Before winter comes you will see the Italian flag flying from it. Before the New Year we shall hold Nice once more, and hold it as long as history lasts. Have no fear, Lucilla. They are beginning to call me an Imperialist, but this is no war of conquest which I have planned; it is a war to recover what the craven leaders of my country yielded to France in the old days. I tell you that the whole seaboard from Mentone to Cagnes-sur-Mer is Italian—Italian in speech, character, and tradition. The French are interlopers. The country which belongs to us shall once more be ours. Other people can prate of philanthropy, of equal division amongst the nations. Hypocrisy, all of it! The greater Italy will hold its own lands. My mission is to make Italy great, and to force any nation which stands in our way into the dust if needs be."

He suddenly rose to his feet and walked the cabin to and fro. His hands were clenched; odd fragments of words half uttered broke from his lips. Lucilla watched him without interrupting. She knew these moods too well. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground. Sometimes his head was thrown back; sometimes it was downcast, his forehead wrinkled. He passed through the phases of many emotions. In the end he sank back once more by her side, exhausted. He took her hands and pressed his lips to hers.

"Lucilla," he murmured, "I have had my glimpse of paradise. Now once more to earth! Tell me this. There is still no news of the papers Uguello was supposed to have been carrying?"

"None," she answered. "I see Torrita night and morning. There is still no news."

He frowned, and there was a momentary flash of anger in his deep-set eyes.

"It is not often," he muttered, "that my messengers of death fail."

"I wish," she sighed, "that you had not to use them so often."

"I am not ashamed of them, Lucilla. When I order death, it is for the good of Italy. Uguello was the ambassador of the Red Shirts, the scum of the country, the Communists, the men whom I hate. One by one they shall go as he went. Red Shirts indeed! They had better dye them quickly, or they will be red with blood. Listen, Lucilla."

"My dear one!"

"Tell Torrita to stay where he is until he can bring me the papers. If they reach Italy, I shall need a new Chief of Police.—You have met Bremner—Lord Bremner, the English Cabinet Minister? They tell me that he is in Monte Carlo."

"Not yet," she acknowledged. "I go out so little."

Matorni glanced at the clock over the mantelpiece.

"You are one of those who never fail me. You will not tell me that it is an impossibility. I wish

a visit from Bremner. I wish him to come here, if possible without actually knowing whom he is to meet, but I wish him here within an hour."

She rose to her feet.

"Monte Carlo is a small place. I shall find him."

He held out his arms. Once more they stood for a few moments motionless.

"My dear beloved!" he whispered. "Never so long again. I have plans—wonderful plans!"

Her face shone with joy. She suddenly bent and kissed his fingers.

"Till you come again, dear lover!" she whispered.

He touched the bell. The door opened, the sentries presented arms. The touch of modernity, represented by her fashionable clothing, seemed to vanish as she swept along the deck. There was an atmosphere of something regal about her as she descended the carpeted steps and took her place in the waiting boat. She might indeed have been a queen leaving her consort.

CHAPTER VIII

The La Festa courts were gay that morning with the sunshine, the fluttering skirts of the girls, the white-flanneled youth of both sexes, free, as it chanced, from the slavery of a tournament, playing light-hearted tennis amongst themselves. Lucilla pushed open the gate and looked anxiously in. Almost at once a little sigh of relief escaped her. In the centre court, Lord Bremner was playing sedate tennis with a trio of acquaintances. She glanced at the clock. Matorni had told her that he sailed at midday, and Matorni had a way of making his will sound like the command of fate. Already she had wasted a quarter of an hour at the Hôtel de Paris. She moved swiftly towards the pavilion, wondering how most readily to attract Bremner's attention. Suddenly she saw Mervyn Amory, who had evidently just finished a set, and was standing with a long tumbler in his hand. She hastened towards him.

"Mr. Amory," she begged, "will you do me a great favour?"

"With the utmost pleasure, Princess," he assured her.

"That is Lord Bremner playing there, is it not?"

"Yes."

"It is imperative that I speak to him at once."

"Before the set is over?" Mervyn asked.

"This moment," she insisted. "Will you do me this kindness, please: will you take Lord Bremner's

place, and send him out to my car? I do not wish to stay about to be presented to him here. There are people who might make remarks—especially this morning. My car is at the gate there. I will sit inside. Please send Lord Bremner to me. It is a matter of the utmost importance, and I promise you—my gratitude."

Mervyn set down his tumbler.

"I cannot answer for Lord Bremner," he warned her, "but I will do what I can."

"He will come," she declared. "I have that much confidence."

She retraced her steps towards the gate, and Mervyn, seizing his opportunity, arrested Bremner in the act of commencing to serve.

"I have a message for you, sir," he announced; "something urgent."

Bremner was naturally surprised. He stepped to one side with Mervyn, however.

"What is the message?" he enquired.

"It is the Princess of Panini who brings it. She is waiting for you out in her car—through that gate there. I can guess her mission. She wants to take you down to the harbour. There is some one on the Italian cruiser who probably wishes to talk to you."

Bremner was already unrolling his shirt sleeves.

"The Princess of Panini," he reflected.

"The great friend of Matorni," Mervyn reminded him under his breath. "I'll take your place in this set."

Bremner nodded.

"You know all these people better than I do. Make my apologies,—and don't treat them to that googly service. I must just put on a coat."

The Princess was seated with her eyes fixed upon her little platinum and diamond wrist watch. She looked up with a smile as Bremner approached, hat in hand, and made room for him by her side.

"You are very kind to come," she acknowledged, "but then, I knew that you would. I am Lucilla di Panini. I am taking you to visit some one upon the cruiser in the harbour."

"May I ask who it is?"

"It is not for me to tell you. It is some one who wishes for a word with your country, and here, to-day, you are her representative."

"I hope your friend will remember," Bremner said slowly, "that England is not governed as Italy is to-day. We have a Cabinet who are collectively responsible for even the minor details of our policy. No one man may speak alone."

"But one man," she pointed out, "can always influence others."

The gaily attired policeman at the corner of the Gardens looked severely at the car flashing by; a second one who guarded the junction of the roads at the bottom of the hill make a movement forward. They swung round, however, and sped along the quay, stopping exactly opposite where the little pinnace was waiting.

"May I send my car back for you?" the Princess asked. "I do not think that you will be kept more than a few minutes."

Bremner shook his head.

"I can climb the steps, thank you."

"I stay for a month," she confided, as he descended, "at the Château de Roquebrune. If you care to visit me, I shall be charmed."

"It will be a privilege, Madame la Princesse," he assured her.

The brief journey across the harbour was accomplished in an incredibly short period of time. Bremner was duly received at the gangway and passed below to the door before which the sentries were standing. There was a quick word, and the butts of the bayonets clattered on to the deck. The door was opened, and Bremner passed through. Matorni stood waiting for him, a welcoming smile upon his lips.

"Signor Matorni," the newcomer said, holding out his hand, "it is some years since we met."

"Years which have dealt kindly with Lord Bremner," was the courteous response. "Please sit down and forgive the informality of my message. I greatly desire the privilege of a few minutes' conversation with you."

"In what capacity?" was the guarded rejoinder.

"In any capacity you choose. Naturally, what I should like would be to put a question to you as representing your country, but you would tell me at once that you cannot answer for her. Very well,

then, let me speak to you as man to man, as an Italian who loves Italy to an Englishman who loves England."

"In that way," Bremner assented gravely, "conversation should be possible."

Matorni lit a cigarette and pushed the box across the table. It was characteristic of him, however, that he did not wait to see whether his companion accepted one.

"Listen," he began, "you have heard of the renaissance of my country. You must know that Italy is not the negligible power she once was. We have gained in strength, moral and actual, year by year. The spirit of the nation has spread to the army and the navy. We have accomplished a new birth in life."

"The whole world," the other admitted, "knows of Italy's progress."

"Naturally," Matorni continued, "we have not moved on towards the accomplishment of our destiny without exciting jealousy. The evidences of this evil feeling have been many. Those to which I wish at this moment to allude have been the frequent attacks upon my life, and these distressing frontier episodes with a nation who, for the last twelve months, has taken every opportunity to insult us. I refer to France."

Bremner made no remark. It seemed as though a mask had settled down upon his face.

"Of these attacks upon my life," Matorni went on, "four can be traced, if not directly to French

agency, to exiles from Italy who have found harbourage in France. The frontier episodes, I admit, are not authoritatively inspired, but listen, Lord Bremner—I say this with deliberation—they are inspired by the hatred of one country for another."

"Misunderstandings may always occur," Bremner suggested quietly.

Matorni silenced him with a gesture—a vast, sweeping gesture, far more effective than words.

"This is not milk-and-water talk," he declared. "Here are two nations whose frontiers touch, simmering with hatred and mistrust the one for the other. It is Italy who is continually being provoked. Very well, what is the natural end of such a situation?"

"I am a listener," was the calm reply.

"War is the only solution," Matorni pronounced fiercely; "war—cruel, unjust, barbaric as it may seem—yet a magnificent blood-letting, the only logical form of settling a dispute which nature has ever vouchsafed to the world. There is no other."

"That is a matter for discussion," Bremner remarked, "between the philosophers and the historians of the world."

Matorni bowed.

"To proceed. Let us look for a moment from the present into the past. I will not insult your historical knowledge by asking you to whom Mentone, Monte Carlo, Nice, should belong. They are Italian, not French. Therefore when France persists in in-

sulting my country, and my country rises in her anger to avenge herself, I say that the fruits of that vengeance should be the lands of which we have been robbed."

"You are treating me to a great confidence, Signor Matorni," Bremner warned him uneasily.

"I take my risk," was the swift retort. "The end is so near that it cannot matter much, but I ask you —I have summoned you here to ask you—a vital question. You are pledged to ally yourself with France if any part of her frontier from the Channel ports to Switzerland is threatened by any foreign Power. You are not bound—I have read your treaty —to assist her in case of any other attack. What would be your position if Italy and France should fight?"

"A duel?"

Matorni flung the cigarette he had been about to light on to the floor. His eyes flashed.

"What does that matter?" he demanded.

"It matters this much," Bremner explained. "If there exists a plot between your country and Germany to attack France, it would probably appear to my country in a different light than if you two alone —France and Italy—started out to settle your grievances between yourselves, whether they are real or imaginary."

Matorni stretched across the table. He struck the top of it with his fist.

"Tell me the truth," he insisted. "What makes you

speak of Germany? What brought it into your mind that we might possibly seek German aid?"

"I am here to listen, not to answer questions," was the cool rejoinder.

Matorni recovered his self-possession with an obvious effort.

"What you mean, in plain words, is, that if Germany helps us, you would help France."

"I have said nothing of the sort," Bremner objected. "I should be the last man on earth to pledge my unfortunate country to another war, even if I had authority in the matter, which I have not. I am simply pointing out to you that there would be a difference in her outlook."

"Tell me as man to man then," Matorni persisted, "what do you believe would happen, supposing Germany threw in her lot with us?"

"Considering the question purely from an academic point of view," Bremner pronounced, after a brief pause, "I should imagine that, in the long run, with great unwillingness, we should be compelled to support France in some form or another."

Matorni, for a few moments, seemed about to give way to one of those fits of fury in which he was said, on rare occasions, to indulge. He raised himself to his full height and struck the table with both fists. The little grey-headed man in tennis flannels, smoking a cigarette so calmly, seemed suddenly dwarfed, to have shrunk to an unreasonable insignificance in the presence of this thunderous virility.

"You exasperate me!" Matorni cried. "You English are the most extraordinary, the most stubborn, the most illogical race who ever breathed. You helped France before. What did you get for it? You found the money, you found the ships, you found your share of the men. Not one penny of the money have you received back again, nothing but grudging depreciation of your sacrifices. There is no nation more hated by France to-day than yours. You have burdened your people with debt for her sake, yet you would allow yourself to be dragged once more down further stages towards ruin by the most degenerate, the most material, the most unscrupulous country upon the map of Europe."

Bremner shrugged his shoulders slightly. He seemed entirely unimpressed.

"It is scarcely worth while our going into these matters, Signor Matorni," he suggested. "I may be forgiven for saying that they do not form a fruitful subject for discussion, especially as I am here as a casual visitor, speaking entirely without authority. But since you have brought a personal note into this conversation, since you have asked me a question as man to man, I will, if I may, say something to you, as man to man."

"I listen," Matorni muttered. "Speak on."

He folded his arms, and stood with a great attempt at immobility. Bremner helped himself to another of the cigarettes which lay scattered upon the table, and lit it.

"You are a great patriot, Matorni," he said; "you have been an immense benefactor to your country. She has responded so wonderfully to your governance, to your guidance, to your genius, that you have constituted yourself, in a way—although your powers are not constitutional—a dictator. That is all very well, so long as your own people are content. Why should we complain? Especially as the whole of Europe has admitted that outside your own country you have shown a sagacity and a statesman-like moderation which—you will forgive me—has sometimes surprised us all. Therefore, as I say, why should we others complain of your home rule, if your own people are content? It is when you look outside your own boundaries that I ask you to consider seriously, as an Italian, as a great patriot if you will, whether you will do well, after all your wonderful work towards her regeneration, to drag your country into a chaos of bloodshed?"

"Damnation! It is an infamous accusation!" Matorni cried.

"It is no accusation at all," Bremner pointed out, "because as yet you have taken no vital step. In Rome, Matorni, you are one of the great men of Europe, but the moment you commence to look across the seas and the frontiers into foreign countries, to breathe in the rarefied atmosphere of Imperialism, you draw something into your system which is like a virulent poison. You are one of the greatest of home statesmen. Be content with that. The age of

conquests is passed. The subjection of one nation by another to-day brings nothing but disaster, which is shared by the conqueror equally with the vanquished. Be content with what you have done for Italy, and you will remain what the whole world now considers you—a great patriot and a great man."

Matorni was ghastly pale, and his features were twitching. He touched the bell and clapped his hands. The doors were thrown open. Once more the bayonets clattered on to the deck.

"I am obliged for your visit, Lord Bremner," he said harshly. "Believe me, I have passed out of the kindergarten of world politics. I imagined that I had to deal with another sort of man."

He made no offer to shake hands, and Bremner, duly escorted, descended the steps, entered the pinnace, and was landed upon the quay. He had scarcely mounted to the street and commenced to stroll up towards the hotel, when he saw dense volumes of smoke escaping from the funnels of the cruiser. He lingered for a moment, looking downwards thoughtfully. The anchor was already up, white-clad sailors were running about in great activity. Later on, as he sat at his luncheon table, he saw her, a speck upon the eastern sea.

CHAPTER IX

Mervyn was somewhat disappointed to find most of the notabilities of Monte Carlo present at the luncheon party at the Château de Roquebrune that day. He was only able to exchange a few words with Rosetta, but afterwards, to his surprise, the Princess wandered away from her more important guests and came to him.

"Mr. Amory," she said, "I am leaving Rosetta to entertain those of my guests who refuse to drift away. I do not feel that they are upon my conscience because at a luncheon party every one should go after the coffee has been served. I want to show you my Greek temple. Will you come with me?—Now tell me," she went on, without hesitation, as soon as they had reached the shelter of the pergola; "you have learned nothing more of your adventure in the train?"

"Nothing whatever," he replied. "I haven't even seen a line in the papers. I meant to ask the Comtessa this morning whether she had heard from the police."

"Rosetta has heard nothing," the Princess confided.

"I can't understand how they manage to hush these affairs up so," Mervyn observed. "It was a Fascist outrage, I suppose?"

The Princess' eyes flashed.

"The Fascists do not commit outrages," she re-

torted coldly. "Sometimes they mete out justice. You seem, like most foreigners, to be very ignorant of Italian affairs."

"Well, that I claim is scarcely our fault," Mervyn protested good humouredly. "You have a dictator who muzzles the press, who interferes whenever he chooses in the administration of justice, and who alters the laws at his will. Your people submit to it, so it isn't our affair, but surely you must admit that it makes your internal politics a little puzzling for us to follow."

"Why try?" the Princess rejoined. "The domestic affairs of Italy concern no one outside. As to our having a dictator who assumes unusual privileges —well, has he not poured fresh life through the veins of a tired country; has he not created a new and glorious Italy? Why, Matorni is one of the greatest and the most patriotic Italians who ever breathed!"

They had reached the temple, and, as though by chance, her eyes wandered to that diminishing trail of smoke. Mervyn watched her in silence. He knew quite well that she had something more to say. Presently she motioned him to a chair and seated herself beside him.

"Mr. Amory," she began, "I am going to speak to you very seriously."

"If you must, Princess," he murmured.

"I must, because, although I am not what you would call in England 'squeamish,' I still have no

fondness for bloodshed. I am a Fascist, Mr. Amory —a devoted follower of Matorni."

"I have gathered that," Mervyn ventured.

"Uguello, the man who was killed in the Blue Train, was a Red Shirt and a traitor," she went on. "He had been to Berlin and to London to collect information which he was proposing to use harmfully in Italy. You know what happened to him."

"I do indeed," Mervyn admitted, with a little shiver.

"Nevertheless, that act of justice was not completely successful. When Uguello boarded the train, he had with him papers containing the fruits of the information which he had collected—papers whose publication in the wrong quarters would do great harm to the Fascist cause."

"They were taken from him when he was murdered, I suppose?"

"They were not taken from him," the Princess replied gravely, "because they had already gone. Every shred of garment he possessed and every inch of the compartment was searched. The papers had disappeared."

"He must have had an accomplice on the train," Mervyn suggested.

"It would seem so," the Princess assented dryly. "On the other hand, most of the Red Shirts likely to be trusted in such an important matter are known by sight to our own agents, several of whom happened to have been on board that train—

including Signor Torrita, the Chief of the Police in Rome. There was no one there who could possibly have been suspected. Uguello was watched from the moment he entered. He spoke to one person and one person only. That person was you."

"I couldn't help that," Mervyn protested. "It was the attendant who placed me at his table. There wasn't another seat. I had never seen the fellow before in my life."

"I am not suggesting, even as a possibility, that you sought him out purposely, or he you, but I do say that, as soon as he realised the situation, there could have been but one thought in his mind—the chance of passing on those papers to some one through whom they might some day or other reach his own party. Any such chance must have seemed to him worth trying. You were—forgive me—an Englishman of ingenuous appearance, and Englishmen, simple though they are, as a rule may be trusted. It must certainly remain amongst the possibilities, therefore, to those whose business it is to recover these papers, that you might have been entrusted with them."

"It might have happened easily enough," Mervyn reflected. "He followed me into my compartment and was there for several minutes alone with me."

"I think that I know your type, Mr. Amory," the Princess went on, after a few moments' pause. "I do not suggest for a minute that you have the slightest sympathy with Fascism, the Red Shirts, or any

of the problems connected with my country. On the other hand, you would consider a promise to a dead man a sacred thing. I want to say this to you. Turn your head, please. Give me your whole attention."

Mervyn obeyed. A faint breeze was stirring the drooping Bougainvillea by which they were surrounded—a breeze which came from the Mediterranean, shaking the tops of the slender grove of pine trees and fluttering in the rose garden. In their ears was the distant murmur of conversation from the departing guests, the humming of bees, and the swish of the sea.

"I ask you no questions, Mr. Amory," the Princess proceeded, her wonderful eyes fixed upon his. "I know beforehand in either case what your answer would be. But I tell you this as from one human being who values life to another who should: if Uguello persuaded you to help him in those few seconds, if you have done so, or are contemplating doing so, you are signing your own death warrant inevitably, indubitably. You would lose your life for the sake of a complete stranger, in support of a foul and disastrous cause. You would not deserve a single thrill of sympathy from any one. I would, as you sit here by my side, stab you to the heart myself, if I thought that you had become Uguello's tool. Is that clear?"

"Horribly," Mervyn confessed, with a wry smile.

"Very well then," the Princess concluded, "our conversation is over. I can see Rosetta making her

way down to the dock. I think that she has promised to show you her new motor boat. I shall not keep you."

Mervyn rose to his feet, and the Princess gave him her fingers.

"Mr. Amory," she said, as he raised them to his lips.

"Princess."

"You are either the most typically British person I ever knew, or the cleverest dissembler."

He smiled; it was almost a grin.

"I wonder which you would consider the greater compliment, Princess?" he ventured, as he left her to follow Rosetta's retreating figure.

The Princess remained where she was seated, her eyes fixed eastwards. There was no longer any trace of her fairy ship, and her heart was suddenly heavy. The joy of that unexpected meeting had taken her up into the mountains. Now that he was gone, the morning seemed like a dream. Even the memory of his embraces failed at that moment to rouse her. She was conscious of depression, unaccountable but complete. These great plans of his—how could they make for happiness? If they succeeded, he would be acclaimed the greatest man in Europe—the greatest man in all the history of his country. And then? With her it was one of those moments when a woman's faintness of heart makes her jealous of even the success of the man she loves—jealous of the success

which seems in her mind to draw them wider apart, as he climbs perforce the path he must needs climb alone.—And if he should fail—that would be more awful still, for he was of the breed of men for whom failure means extinction. She was a woman of moods, and she suddenly felt herself enveloped in new terrors. Hope seemed to be slipping away from her. Those great dreams, those wonderful ambitions,—where, after all, were they leading? Him to the unwholesome power of the despot; her to the isolation of the woman left upon the plains. In that moment of weakness, she felt that she could even have learned of the crumbling of all these great schemes with equanimity. No man who had ever lived had shown himself strong enough to endure complete success.

There was the sound of a car in the avenue. A few minutes later her majordomo appeared.

"Will Madame la Princesse receive the Baron von Grezzner?" he enquired.

The Princess hesitated. She was in the humour to talk to no one.

"The Baron desired me to say that his mission was urgent," the man continued.

The Princess assented, and sank into her chair. Soon the man reappeared, with Von Grezzner close at his heels. The smile upon the latter's face was there as usual—a graven thing. His greeting was courtly and vociferous as ever, but with the departure of the servant his whole expression changed.

"Madame la Princesse," he confided, "I fear now indeed the worst."

"Explain yourself, please," she begged.

"I have despatches from Berlin. They have come most of the way by aeroplane. They inspire in me the terrifying belief that after all Uguello succeeded, that by some means or other he passed on his papers before his death."

"Just why?" the Princess enquired, with an equanimity which amazed her companion.

"My despatches speak of a sudden visit by French and English officers of the Commission to our disarmament centres. We have been asked to furnish a complete list of our commercial aeroplanes, with particulars of their engines and structural work. At least a dozen English and French experts who had almost given up their activities in Germany have suddenly made their reappearance."

"This may be only accidental," the Princess observed thoughtfully. "You must admit that during the last few years, Baron, you have tried that visiting commission very high. Your own account to Matorni of your preparedness for war in the air was amazing. It is hard to conduct these preparations in perfect secrecy."

"But up till now we have done so," the Baron protested. "Up till now they have professed to suspect, they have occasionally made trouble, but in reality they have suspected nothing. We have thrown dust in their eyes with the utmost ease. The English—

pooh, they are idiots! There have been some of the French who have been unduly inquisitive, who have made shrewd complaints, but we have passed them on from department to department until in the end they have worn themselves out. This is something new. These men who have arrived are looking for something definite. I tell you, Princess, I have the great fear. This man Torrita kept his word, I admit. Uguello never reached Italy, but his papers—you yourselves confess that you could never trace them. He had the luck which comes only to those who are about to die, supposing he succeeded in passing on his mandate."

The Princess shook her head. Her attitude was shaken, however. Even Von Grezzner realised that.

"My dear man," she assured him, "it is impossible. Uguello registered his luggage at Victoria and passed through the barrier to his place in the train with those papers in his possession. He spoke to but one person during the whole journey, and that was the man who chanced to be opposite him at dinner time. There was no one else. I know that."

"But how?" the Baron demanded.

"Torrita was upon the train—Torrita and three of his men who were responsible for what happened. Uguello was caught there like a rat in a trap. I tell you on the word of Torrita that Uguello exchanged speech with no one throughout that journey save the Englishman."

"Well—the Englishman?"

The Princess smiled. Here indeed she felt more confident.

"A quarter of an hour ago," she confided, "he sat where you are sitting now, Baron. I have approached him in every way—cajoled him, laughed at him, threatened him, and watched him all the time. I swear that so far as the great things go, he is a simpleton. He is just what he seems to be—an English tennis player who thinks of little else in life but his sport. Besides, supposing Uguello found an opportunity to pass the papers on to any one, to whom would they go, think you? He could have taken them to Downing Street or the Quai d'Orsay himself, with the slightest of risks. He had one idea, and one idea only—to bring the knowledge of Matorni's schemes back to Italy, so that his assassination should be made a certainty, so that his great schemes should be thwarted before they came to maturity. Is there a moment of disquiet in Italy? Not one. Matorni is, as he has always been, the people's god, and the Red Shirts, without a weapon to handle, remain a pack of snarling curs."

The Baron remained silent for a moment, but his expression was more cheerful.

"Princess," he admitted, "almost I am convinced. I have known that young Englishman for four years. I, too, would swear that he is harmless. I shall send word back to my people that they alarm themselves unnecessarily."

"I agree."

"As for the packet Uguello was carrying—"

"I have come to the conclusion that he destroyed it," the Princess interrupted. "For that, he might have found the opportunity."

The Baron rose to his feet and bent over her hand. There was a great relief in his manner.

"Princess," he murmured, "to visit you is to receive always inspiration."

She smiled wistfully. Again her eyes were sweeping the empty blue sea.

"The inspiration comes from over yonder," she replied.

CHAPTER X

To all appearance the season progressed with its accustomed swing at Monte Carlo. People took their cocktails at the Royalty, lunched at Ciro's, dined at the Hôtel de Paris, supped at the Carlton, with the usual regularity. The younger world played golf at Mont Agel, tennis at La Festa, or found excuses to motor over to Nice or Cannes. Everybody met at the Sporting Club for an hour or so before and after dinner. The usual number of dark-visaged foreigners descended upon the place from unheard-of countries, won fabulous sums of other people's money, and got away with it. Occasionally an American millionaire turned the tables upon them, and a French manufacturer, who frequently swooped down upon the place from Cannes, was credited with some sensational winnings. The whole delightful little cycle of life was lived out according to pattern. The men lost who could afford to lose, and those won to whom it was of little moment. Gala dinner succeeded gala dinner; everybody swore they would never go to another, and everybody scrambled for places when the time came. At the first of the tennis tournaments, Mervyn carried off chief honours amongst the men, and the French lady champion, although she had the inevitable fit of hysterics when she had lost one set, made the rest of the ladies look as though they were playing patball.

And yet, underneath it all, there was a certain

rather curious feeling of uneasiness which nobody professed to be able wholly to understand. The Italian newspapers had almost disappeared from the kiosk in the Gardens, and when one was procurable, it seemed to contain little except highly coloured accounts of more frontier incidents between the Italians and the French. The French press had adopted a curiously guarded tone, but one paper, in particular, went so far as to regret that Italy, whenever possible, seemed to give so much prominence and attach so much importance to incidents which it would be wiser to ignore. On the whole, however, the hand of the censor was visible on the one side, and the pen of the sensationalist upon the other. The ordinary visitor to the place took the whole matter lightly. The idea of any serious trouble was laughed to derision—especially by the English element. No one seemed to notice that one by one most of the better-known Italians were dropping away from the place. Lord Bremner, too, had taken his leave, summoned suddenly back to London to attend a special Cabinet Council, concerning which the press affected to show much curiosity. Von Grezzner had departed for Germany, by aeroplane from Nice. Général de Parnouste had taken a villa near La Turbie, and was reported to be learning to drive a car in the mountainous roads of the vicinity. Mervyn had once or twice been permitted to act as escort to the Princess and her cousin, in the various social festivities of the district, and he had dined with them sev-

eral times. Suddenly, however, and without any ostensible reason, the doors of the Château seemed closed to him. He presented himself several times there in vain, and his telephone messages were always met by the response that Madame la Princesse and Signorina la Comtessa were not at home. All the time he was conscious of being day by day more closely and insistently watched. Never for a moment did his unknown persecutors relax their vigilance. If he walked the streets at night, there was always a shadowy figure in the middle of the road, or on the other side of the street. If he visited a restaurant for supper, some one would drift in a few minutes later and take a table within hearing of his. There was generally a stranger in the corridor of the hotel, talking to the valet or the waiter when he came out of his room, always some one standing behind him when he looked on at roulette or *chemin de fer* at the Sporting Club. Occasionally he accosted one of these, but never with any success. The loiterer in the corridor turned out to be a hairdresser waiting for a client, the man in the street a harmless saunterer along the byways, the solitary figure watching his every stroke at tennis an enthusiast temporarily forbidden to play. One day he met the Princess seated at an umbrella-shaded table at the Royalty Bar. He had come straight from the tennis courts with a crowd of friends, but he at once detached himself and made his way to her table.

"One sees nothing of you nowadays, Mr. Amory," she observed graciously.

He bowed over her fingers.

"I am afraid any longer to visit my friends, Princess," he confessed.

"And why?" she enquired.

"Well, in the first place, because I never seem to have the good fortune to find them at home. Furthermore, I am becoming convinced that I must have committed some secret and unconscious crime."

"You have not the air of a criminal, Mr. Amory," she remarked, in friendly fashion.

"I can assure you that I have become suspect to some one or other. Wherever I go, I am followed. Let me see," he added, looking around. "Who is it this morning? Ah, there we are, I think—the sallow-faced young man who has just come in and taken a seat over there. He isn't looking at us; he never is looking, but he sees all the time. I can't help connecting all this, Princess, with what you were saying to me the last time we met."

The Princess smiled. She turned to her companion, whom Mervyn had already recognised—a short, dark man, with heavy eyebrows, hooked nose and unobtrusive manner.

"Torrita," she said, "let me present you to Mr. Mervyn Amory—Signor Torrita. Mr. Amory is complaining of the attentions of your myrmidons."

"My myrmidons!" Torrita repeated, with a disclaiming gesture.

"Mr. Amory," the Princess continued, "is the English tennis player who has been the subject of so much discussion between us all—the young man, you know, who had the ill fortune to have been placed at the same dining table as the man Uguello, the night he was murdered in the Blue Train. Signor Torrita's official position at Rome is well known, Mr. Amory, although perhaps in your absorbed life you may not have heard it. He is the Chief of the Italian Secret Police."

"Mr. Amory," Torrita murmured, his eyes seeming suddenly to bore their way into the back of Mervyn's head. "I hear often of your tennis. I understand that that is your chief occupation in life."

"It has been up to the present," was the brief reply. "I have now found a new sport—that is to dodge these ubiquitous gentlemen."

Torrita's face remained unrelaxed.

"You will forgive me," he begged, "if I assure you that the last man who spoke to Uguello alive is fortunate that worse has not befallen him than merely to be followed. Uguello was a dangerous person. To have been seen in his company on that particular journey was to render one a marked man for life."

There was a summons for Mervyn from the inside room, where some tennis arrangements were being discussed. He made his adieux. Before he left, however, he moved a little closer to Torrita, and stood with his hand upon the back of his chair.

"It would be asking too much, I suppose," he ventured, "to enquire the exact nature of my offence?"

"Not in the least," was the unhesitating reply. "So much of my work has to be conducted in almost monotonous secrecy that it is a relief when one can tell the truth. You are being watched so that you may have no opportunity of entering into communication with any of the party to which Uguello belonged in Italy—the Red Shirts, they are commonly called. You may have something to communicate to them; you may not. We take no risks."

"The fact that I am English and don't care a snap of the fingers about your Italian politics does not affect the question, I suppose?"

"Not in the slightest degree," was the suave reply.

Mervyn turned away a little abruptly. The eyes of both the man and the woman followed him speculatively.

"My own opinion is," the Princess pronounced, "that the young man is perfectly harmless. Rosetta is very much attracted by him, and he by her, and I think that I am overdoing things by keeping them apart."

"That may be," Torrita agreed carelessly. "I must admit that the daily reports of his doings give no possible cause for suspicion. At the same time, the last man who spoke with Uguello on this earth must take his chances. It is quite likely that the young

man may be all that he seems to be, but it is a curious fact that notwithstanding the cast-iron secrecy with which our plans have been developed during the last few weeks, France has suddenly shown an amazing interest in the defences of her southern coast, and Germany has been made the object of persistent persecution on the part of inquisitive members of the Franco-British Military Commission. Furthermore, two of the most brilliant members of the Military Section of our Intelligence Department were detailed for an operation near here three weeks ago and have not returned. Our lips are sealed, of course, but we know what their absence means."

"Still," the Princess ruminated, "if Uguello had wanted to disclose Matorni's scheme to France or England, he could have done so himself, and probably earned an immense reward. We know quite well that wasn't his idea at all. He wanted to stagger the whole of Italy with the news, published broadcast by the Red Shirts."

"You are right," Torrita acknowledged, after a moment's pause, during which he had summoned a waiter, and ordered another glass of vermouth. "We have proof that Uguello never intended to communicate with England and France. That is what makes me inclined to agree with you that the young man is probably harmless. To tell you the truth," he went on, "these rumours which seem to have reached France and England are annoying, but not necessarily fatal. It is our people at home who must be

kept in ignorance until the right moment. It is on their account that military concentrations are being kept out of the papers, the launching of our two new battleships, the activities in our aerodromes. Matorni has seen to it that the discipline in our army is magnificent, but there are Red Shirts there, of course, and plenty of them. An unprovoked war of conquest would be terribly unpopular. We have to wait for the incident. Matorni will stage-manage that."

"There seem to be incidents of a sort every day," the Princess murmured, glancing idly across to the table where Mervyn and his friends were seated.

"That is all according to plan," Torrita explained grimly. "There is a great deal which is barred from our newspapers just now, but every trifling fracas at the frontier is reported in large type. Why, we even had a semi-official protest from France the other day, regretting the prominence our press gave to these disagreeable incidents."

"How ingenuous!" the Princess observed.

They both turned to watch with interest the departure of Mervyn and his friends—half a dozen of them, all in flannels, carrying racquets, and crowding into two-seated cars. They were apparently off to play a match at Beaulieu and were indulging in a great deal of chaff. Torrita rolled a cigarette.

"If our young English friend is really in the game," he remarked, "he is clever enough to make fools of us all."

CHAPTER XI

A bath, followed by a shower, a shave and a change—excellent things after a long day's tennis, Mervyn decided, as with a final twist to his tie, he lit a cigarette and reëntered his sitting room. And there, upon the mantelpiece, was a large, square envelope, which, from the moment his eyes lit upon it, seemed to him in some way sinister. It was addressed to "Monsieur Mervyn Amory," and bore simply the number of his room. He tore it open, and found one of the cards in common use amongst the restaurants of the Principality, announcing the reopening of the Provençal Bar that night, with many attractions, and a little note at the bottom that a table had been reserved for him. He read it carefully through, reread it, and took it to the window. Then he tore it into small pieces, deposited them in the waste-paper basket, and afterwards stepped out of the French window on to the balcony, seeking fresh air, oppressed by a sudden sense of crisis. By the Casino clock it was exactly half-past eight. Opposite, at the Café de Paris, he could see men and women dining and dancing in the distance like shadows, could almost distinguish the faces of the loungers nearer to him at the smaller tables. People were still grouped together upon the seats in the square. A corner of the moon was already showing. Even the flowers in the garden below were visible. And always passing in and out of the Casino was

that thin incessant stream of people. It was a cheerful little scene, with one marring note so far as Mervyn was concerned. Down below, on the pavement, strolling back and forth, smoking a cigarette, his eyes now and then upon the broad entrance to the hotel, was one of those dark, furtive figures to whose haunting propinquity he was now becoming almost accustomed.

He descended by the lift, crossed the floor of the hall, and presented himself at the cashier's office. The man, to whom he was well known, greeted him pleasantly.

"Packet Number Two, if you please," Mervyn demanded, scribbling his signature upon a piece of paper.

The clerk took it away with him and disappeared into the inner office. Presently he returned, carrying a long, oblong packet in his hand, which Mervyn placed in his breast coat pocket. As he turned away, a loiterer from the lounge came up to the window with some casual enquiry. Mervyn recognised him, and, without any outward sign of the fact, lost his temper. He had meant to button up his overcoat cautiously, hail a stalwart acquaintance who was seated in the hall, and take him round with him to the Sporting Club where they were both dining with different parties. He changed his mind, however, mounted the stairs, and walked along the broad carpeted way alone. When he reached the lift to the right, he knew without even glancing around that he

was being followed. He descended by means of the lift, and made his way slowly along the first passage. As he neared the end, he paused as though to strike a match. He could hear the footsteps of his pursuer close behind. With no sign of having seen or heard anything, Mervyn mounted a little languidly the spiral staircase leading to the next floor. At its first bend he paused and crouched down. His pursuer came on, swung swiftly up the stairs, a gleam of excitement in his face, his right hand, clutching something, already stealing from his jacket pocket. As he came round the corner, Mervyn straightened himself like lightning. The other man too was quick, but he was fully three seconds too late. Mervyn's fist crashed into his face, and he fell, a senseless mass, in the middle of the carpeted way just as the lift from above stopped, the door opened, and Rosetta stepped out, only to stand transfixed, with a little cry of horror. Lying across the passage was the man who had been following Mervyn, groaning but apparently unconscious, his hands stretched out, and a vicious-looking knife a few feet away from him. The lift man hurried forward, and Mervyn hastily descended the few remaining steps.

"That fellow has been following me about for days," he told the attendant. "A thief, without a doubt. He stole up the stairs after me. You can guess what he was going to do. I got in first, that's all. Get a couple of porters and have him moved."

The lift man, to whom Mervyn was very well

known, ran quickly up the stairs. Rosetta's fingers suddenly stole into Mervyn's, her eyes were fixed wonderingly upon his face.

"Mr. Amory," she asked, "why do you look like that? You are not hurt?"

His fury had spent itself, and he even managed to smile.

"I beg your pardon, Comtessa," he said. "To tell you the truth, I was nearly out of my senses with anger. I didn't mind the first few days, but that sort of thing"—he pointed to the man and the knife —"has got on my nerves. I'll tell you what he is. He's one of Torrita's men—out for murder. My God, it's a good thing he isn't able to stand up again!"

She looked at him in amazement. Always there had seemed to her a touch of the boy about him— the healthy, sunburned boy, with childish eyes. He was very much the man just then—a man in a fury.

"I am very sorry," she faltered. "I am glad you weren't hurt though. He's not—he's not dead, is he?"

"Not he," Mervyn answered scornfully. "Serve him right if he were. It might stop some of them from going in for this dirty work."

The hall porter, followed by an assistant, came running down the stairs. Mervyn was well known to them, and his version of what had happened was quite satisfactory.

"Don't you wait, sir," the hall porter advised. "I'll send the *chasseur* for the gendarmes. He'll come to, fast enough, out of doors."

Rosetta passed her arm through Mervyn's.

"Please let us go back again," she begged.

He followed her mechanically up the stairs. She led the way to the door of the Club.

"Are you in a hurry?" she asked. "Can you sit down with me for a moment in the bar? I feel a little shaken. That man's face was awful, and there is blood upon your knuckle."

He wound his handkerchief around it.

"I am doing nothing at all," he told her. "I thought I'd dine here downstairs with some of the crowd. I'm awfully sorry you came along just then."

She looked at him curiously.

"I'm not so sure that I am," she said. "We'll find two easy chairs, right in the inner part there. Please order me a champagne cocktail."

Mervyn gave the order. Already he was beginning to recover himself.

"So that is what you are like when you are angry," she remarked presently.

"I'm afraid I was rather a brute," he admitted. "But after all, we're in France, or rather on French soil. What have I done that I should be hounded about by these Italian spies, just because your friend Torrita believes that I've got some papers he wants? It isn't sporting. It's damnable!"

She laughed at him softly and repeated his words.

"'It isn't sporting!' Mr. Amory, may I tell my cousin that? I would love to tell Torrita too."

"You can tell them both," Mervyn assented. "And look here, Comtessa," he went on, leaning forward with a very determined expression, "you can tell them this too—you can tell them that Uguello *did* give me the papers, you can tell them I've got them, and they can send along as many cut-throats as they like to take them from me—and then they'll be just as well off as they are now."

She looked at him in horror.

"Don't, don't!" she begged. "Mr. Amory—take that back. I did not hear."

"Well, there's no one else in the room," he pointed out, with a grim smile. "I don't care. I didn't come into this thing of my own will. You know now. What are you going to do? I was a fool to tell you, of all people in the world, because you're just the one person I wanted to be friends with."

"Friends!" she murmured.

"You're right," he exclaimed. "It's a fool of a word. You can think I've lost my head, if you like, Rosetta—a paroxysm of truth upon me. I love you, child! That's the truest thing I ever said. Now what are you going to do? Fetch Torrita?"

She glanced out of the opening and leaned towards him.

"I'm going to kiss you, Mervyn," she whispered.

A warning cough from Arnould, most discreet of barmen, a few minutes later, had the desired effect.

A little company of *chemin de fer* players, from a table which had just broken up, trooped into the room.

"And now?" Rosetta murmured, gazing critically into a small, jade-backed mirror.

"It occurs to me," Mervyn remarked, "that you may be a little late for dinner."

"Horribly," she assented. "It does not much matter, though, as I am quite alone. Lucilla is dining with the Italian Consul, and whatever they will talk about without telling each other lies all the time, I cannot imagine."

"You couldn't dine with me downstairs?" he suggested wistfully. "It's awfully quiet there."

"An adorable idea," she agreed, "but are you not engaged with a party or something?"

"Nothing of the sort," he assured her eagerly. "Some of us often dine together when we've been out to tennis, but there's never any engagement."

So they drifted downstairs, with the benevolent glance of Arnould behind them, and the beaming smile of the suavest *maître d'hôtel* in the Principality to welcome them. They were established at a corner table, and Mervyn held the menu before him helplessly. The whole thing seemed to him deliriously incredible. He could not believe that it was really Rosetta who sat by his side, peering daintily into the mirror of her vanity case.

"Food!" he exclaimed. "How can one possibly

bring one's mind down to food! I haven't the faintest idea what to order. I feel it ought to be nightingales' tongues, and manna and peaches, and all sorts of things that goddesses feed on."

She drew the menu from his resistless fingers, laughing.

"If you do not mind," she objected, "I am hungry. Bisque soup—delicious! We shall not want any fish after that. Saddle of lamb, and asparagus. Asparagus I must have. I hope it will not ruin you, Mervyn. Are you well off, by-the-by? It does not matter, if you are poor. I have plenty."

"Don't tell me that you are an heiress!" he exclaimed.

She nodded.

"I have a castle too," she confided, "but you needn't live in it. It is horribly uncomfortable. You see, it is the American side of me that produced money."

"I don't mind a bit," he replied. "I've got more than I've ever been able to spend as a bachelor, and Bremner tells me that I shall be much better off in a year or two's time."

"Is Lord Bremner your trustee?"

"Uncle, trustee, and all the rest of it—and a jolly good sort. Rosetta, you won't want to live in Italy all the time, will you?"

"I do not think so. Why?"

"I don't think I should like it. The Italians I've

met lately seem to think of nothing but killing one another or somebody else."

"They are a crazy lot just now," she admitted. "Do not let us talk about them. You would like to live here perhaps, yes? I would not mind."

They talked nonsense, more or less, during the progress of the meal. When it was over, though, and she decided that she must go home, she became suddenly serious.

"Mervyn," she said, "I want you to promise me something. You will? Yes?"

"I am feeling very amiable," he confessed.

"I shall not remember a thing you have said to me to-night," she confided. "I mean, of course, about Uguello's papers."

"As long as you remember the rest!"

"Am I likely to forget that?" she asked softly. "Do you know that you have made me ridiculously happy, Mervyn?"

"And what about me?" he whispered passionately.

Their table was a secluded one, and her fingers clung to his for a few moments fondly.

"You are to promise me," she insisted, "that you will be careful. To-morrow morning I shall go to Torrita. I shall tell him of the knife I saw in the hand of that man. It is no good speaking to Lucilla. She thinks and dreams and feels nothing, save for Matorni."

She broke off for a moment, distraught by a

sweeping fit of passion. Her eyes blazed, her cheeks had become colourless.

"I hate the whole business of scheming and assassination," she went on, a moment or two later. "Promise me—promise me, Mervyn, that you will keep your life sacred for my sake."

"I promise," he whispered confidently.

She was silent for a few moments; then her old self again. There remained with her, however, then and for some time afterwards, an undernote of seriousness.

"I wonder," he speculated, "how quickly one can get married in Monaco?"

"Perhaps," she suggested, as he called for the bill, "you had better find out."

CHAPTER XII

THE Provençal Bar was a well-known supper and dancing resort in Monte Carlo, which was throwing open its doors on this particular night for the first time since redecoration. Already most of the tables were taken when Mervyn made his appearance, and a small crowd was gathered round the American Bar, which was a feature of the place. At his first entrance nobody seemed to take any unusual notice of him. He yielded his coat and hat to the *vestiaire*, patted the inside pocket of his dinner coat for a moment, and crossed the threshold. Ferrari, the proprietor, at once hastened up. His customary beaming smile of welcome was modified by an underlying expression of some anxiety. He greeted his visitor, however, with the utmost consideration. Like most of the waiters and the members of the orchestra, he was obviously Italian.

"Your table is reserved, sir," he announced a little nervously. "I have put you in the corner there—at some distance from the music."

"You felt sure that I'd come, then?" Mervyn observed pleasantly.

"I did not doubt it, sir."

Mervyn settled down in his place and gave an order to the waiter in attendance. Ferrari, after the establishment of a fresh party of guests, reappeared.

"Monsieur would perhaps like to take an *apéritif* at the bar while his supper is being prepared," he

suggested in a low tone. "We have a wonderful new cocktail mixer. Dan, he is called."

Mervyn, with an uncomfortable feeling that he was being stage-managed, made his way to the bar and climbed on to a high stool. Evidently this was all part of the game. A young barman in spotless linen hastened to serve him.

"Anything new in cocktails—dry?" Mervyn enquired.

"I have invented one myself, sir," the man answered, looking steadily at his customer. "I have called it after my own name, with some slight alteration—'The Dane'—DANE."

"You can serve me with one."

The barman reached down some bottles, juggled for a few minutes with the cocktail shaker, and presently poured out its contents, frothing.

"If Monsieur wishes to amuse himself to-night," he confided, leaning a little way over the counter, "we have a new *danseuse* here, just arrived from Italy, and only staying a few days. She is wearing red. She calls herself Caterina. She is a very beautiful dancer, and she speaks French or English."

Mervyn nodded, with the air of one who understands, praised his cocktail, paid for it, and took his leave. Soon his supper was served, and the music recommenced. The professional *danseuses*, seated at various tables, were easily recognisable. Caterina, in brilliant red, sat alone—over-slim, perhaps, but with a beautiful figure, and large, haunting eyes which

rested frequently upon his. Mervyn waited for some time, and then took the plunge. He crossed the room and bowed.

"Would you care to dance, Mademoiselle?" he invited.

She rose at once. From the first he knew that she was very nervous. Her hands were cold, her movements stiff, and she continually looked towards the door as though terrified. Soon, however, she became reassured. When they had finished, and the orchestra gave a signal for an exhibition dance, Mervyn led her back to his table. He ordered more wine and glasses. Mademoiselle began to appear more at her ease.

"You must forgive me if I am a little nervous to-night," she begged. "It is my first appearance here. I must please the manager, for it is a great thing to be made welcome at a place like this. Monsieur has been here long, no?"

"Three weeks or so."

"Monsieur is the player of tennis, is he not?"

Mervyn nodded.

"We are all the same, we English, aren't we?" he asked, passing her his cigarette case. "We waste our time playing with balls, when we ought, I suppose, to be making history somewhere or other."

"I am not so sure," she said quietly, "that Monsieur wastes his time."

"You seem to know something about me."

"One hears things. This is rather a strange little

place," she went on, leaning towards him. "The manager and nearly all the waiters are exiled from Italy; they have said something against the Government, or somehow offended. It is very easily done."

"Red Shirts," Mervyn suggested.

Her hand dropped suddenly upon his. She looked around as though terrified.

"Do not use that word here," she begged. "Do not speak it out loud anywhere."

"But after all," he reminded her reassuringly, "we are in France. I am not at all sure that Fascism is still popular with the French people."

"We are in France," she admitted uneasily, "but we are near the frontier, and there are spies everywhere. Shall we dance again, Monsieur?"

"If you wish, certainly."

She leaned towards him presently, speaking under cover of the over-clamorous music.

"If you have anything special to say to me or I to you," she confided, "it is better to say it afterwards. It would be much wiser now that we seemed interested in each other. A little flirtation, yes? It is reasonable?"

Mervyn looked down and agreed. The girl's suggestion, too, was evidently a wise one, for a good many people were watching them. Instinctively he modified his somewhat stiff method of dancing.

"I shall leave the matter in your hands," he whispered. "You shall teach me the whole art of flirta-

tion. We Saxons are rather clumsy when we come to play with words."

She laughed up into his face.

"Monsieur will be an apt pupil, I think," she predicted.

"I shall do my best," he promised her. "Perhaps I should have been able to do better still, but to-night is rather a wonderful night with me. An hour or so ago, I became engaged to be married."

The smile left her face, and a graver expression took its place. Somehow he fancied that it was for his sake, not hers, that she was showing concern.

"I ask myself with wonder," she murmured, "why Monsieur finds such adventures as to-night's appeal to him when he is able to obtain happiness in a so much better way."

He looked around.

"My dear young lady," he expostulated, taking shelter for a moment near the saxophone, "you don't imagine for a single instant, I hope, that I am in this for fun. I stumbled into the affair by accident, and my only concern is—especially now—to finish with it and get out."

She relapsed into silence. Presently they returned to their table, and supper was served. They danced again and no word was spoken of serious things. It was not until a good many people had left the room, and the tables on either side of them were empty that Mervyn took the plunge. He leaned towards her, after a careful glance around.

"Listen," he said, "I have something for you."

Again there was the shadow of that fear in her eyes, which she had shown when he had first approached her.

"Not here," she whispered. "If you are ready, we will go. You had better come up with me to my hotel. It is a very safe place."

"Just as you like," he assented.

He paid the bill, and presently they left together. Caterina, in a wonderful red coat trimmed with chinchilla, took his arm as they stood outside, waiting for a carriage.

"You do not mind?" she asked a little wistfully. "It is better that all these people think we have a little flirtation, yes?"

"That's all right," he agreed, "but listen. Where is your hotel?"

"Up in Beausoleil."

He indulged in a little grimace, and pointed to a light burning in one of the corner windows of the Hôtel de Paris.

"That is my sitting room," he confided. "You know more, perhaps, about this business than I do, but I should have thought that it would have been a great deal safer for me to have taken you there. There will be fewer people about, and of a different class."

She considered the matter for a moment.

"It is possible that Monsieur is right," she admitted.

A carriage rattled up. They drove off with the benediction of the *concierge*, she sitting close to him, her head resting almost upon his shoulder. In a few minutes they reached the hotel, and passed across the deserted lounge to the lift. The night porter raised his eyebrows at the sight of Mervyn's companion, but was too well trained to show surprise. Along the shadowy corridors Caterina looked to the right and the left as though in fear. She drew a little sigh of relief as the two doors closed behind them, and she sank into an easy chair in his sitting room. Mervyn mixed her a drink and brought it from the sideboard, waited whilst she lit a cigarette, and then helped himself.

"And now the word?" he asked, looking at her keenly.

"Venice," she gasped.

Mervyn for a moment remained motionless. Her eyes were fixed upon his with almost pathetic anxiety. His had strayed away towards the calendar which hung upon the wall. Then he bowed, unfastened his dinner coat, drew out the packet from his pocket and handed it to her. She opened her cloak and thrust it into the bosom of her gown. Her fingers were shaking.

"Why on earth did they choose you for this sort of business?" he asked sympathetically.

"I am the one who should be chosen," she replied, "for of those others I have a great hatred, and a great cause for hatred. To-night I have been nervous

all the time. I cannot tell what has come to me. Feel my hand, Monsieur. I am cold."

Mervyn laughed at her encouragingly, but there was little warmth in his manner.

"Finish up your drink and have another," he invited. "You scarcely drank any wine at supper. You have succeeded, have you not? You have nothing to fear. You are amongst friends at the Provençal, and at your hotel."

"It is true," she answered feverishly. "I am stupid, and you, Monsieur, are so kind. You would like me to hurry away, I know, and indeed with this perhaps I am better away. You will come again, and see me with my friends at the Provençal? Very soon, perhaps?"

"I shall certainly come," he promised her.

She finished her drink, refused another, and he escorted her to the lift. When he would have descended, however, she stopped him.

"Please not," she begged. "The porter will get me a little carriage."

"You are sure that you will be safe?" he asked her gravely. "Remember, all sorts of people may have been watching you."

"I shall be safer alone than with you," she declared, with a little break in her voice, "as safe as I ever shall be again in this world."

He kissed her fingers and handed her into the lift. Afterwards he returned to his rooms, and from the balcony watched her carriage as it drove up the

hill. She was sitting back amongst the cushions, but as it passed one of the electric standards, he caught a glimpse of her face, and it seemed to him that it was ghastly. One of the horses was a little restive, and the *cocher* cracked his whip. With a forward lunge, the carriage disappeared in the shadow of the trees.

CHAPTER XIII

MERVYN's awakening the next morning was, in its way, alarming. A gendarme stood by his bedside. He caught a glimpse of two others in the sitting room. He sat up in bed in time to receive the salute of his visitor, the deputy *Chef de Sûreté* of the Monaco Police, with whom he had already some acquaintance.

"I regret the necessity to disturb you, Mr. Amory," he apologized. "We knocked at the door several times without result."

"What has happened?" Mervyn demanded hastily.

The *Chef de Sûreté* shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Amory has not forgotten that last night an attack was made, if not upon his life, at any rate upon his person."

Mervyn was conscious of a curious sense of relief. He swung round in bed and rang the bell for the waiter.

"I remember it all right, now that I'm awake," he acknowledged. "A nasty-tempered fellow, with a knife. Fortunately I got my fist in first."

"The man will be charged this morning, at half-past ten. I am afraid we will have to ask for Monsieur's presence."

Mervyn glanced at his watch.

"Three quarters of an hour," he remarked. "I'll be there. At the Tribunal, I suppose?"

"*Parfaitement.* There has been a rumour that the man belonged to a dangerous gang. For that reason I have brought two gendarmes with me as an escort, if Monsieur would desire them."

"Certainly not," Mervyn declared. "In broad daylight, in the streets of Monaco? Monsieur Hémarde, I am surprised at you! You will see me at the Tribunal at half-past ten."

His visitors took their leave. Luigi served him with his tea in silence. René, whilst he shaved him, ventured upon a question.

"Is it true that Monsieur was attacked in the passage outside the Sporting Club last night?" he enquired.

"Something of the sort," Mervyn assented. "I've got to hurry off now, and see about it. The gendarmerie at half-past ten."

René accepted the hint, and asked no more questions.—At precisely the appointed hour, Mervyn arrived at the court, and was ushered into a large, gloomy apartment. Three or four officials, including the *Procureur*, were seated upon a raised dais. A few members of the public were railed off behind; other people interested appeared to have seated themselves promiscuously. The man who had attacked him, with his face bandaged up and his wrists handcuffed, was sitting dejectedly upon a bench. The *Procureur* called upon Amory by name, and bowed politely.

"You are Mervyn Amory, the Englishman who

is alleged to have been assaulted in the passage leading from the Hôtel de Paris to the Sporting Club last night?" he enquired.

"I am he," Mervyn acquiesced.

"The case," the *Procureur* continued, "will not require your attendance for more than a few minutes. *Monsieur le Juge d'Instruction* will read the confession of the prisoner."

An official in a black gown stood up and read from a long sheet of paper:

"My name is Michel Machisto, an Italian, twenty-nine years of age, born at Milan. I came to Monte Carlo to find a situation as a waiter. I was unsuccessful, and had spent all my money. This evening I was in the Hôtel de Paris, hoping to be able to get a word with the head waiter. I saw the English gentleman go to the cashier's desk, and receive what I took to be a packet of money. I have never been in trouble before, but I determined to rob him. I followed him to the end of a long passage, and tried to catch him up on a staircase. He must have seen me coming, however, and before I could catch hold of him he knocked me down. That is all I remember."

On further questioning, the prisoner added this statement:

"It is true that a knife fell out of my clothing, but it was not in my hand, and I had no intention of using it. My sole purpose was to snatch the packet away from the Englishman, and escape if possible."

The *Procureur* blinked for a moment and looked across at the prisoner.

"Is that your statement, Michel Machisto?" he enquired.

"That is my statement," was the sullen reply.

The *Procureur* motioned to Mervyn, who stood up again.

"With regard to this knife," he said, "can you tell me whether it was in the prisoner's hand when he was preparing to strike you?"

"I believe that it was, sir," Mervyn replied. "At any rate, it fell out of his hand when I knocked him down."

The *Procureur* coughed.

"Is there any one in court of the prisoner's nationality knowing anything about him?" he enquired.

There was no immediate response. The *Procureur* addressed the prisoner again.

"Do you know any one in Monaco or in Monte Carlo who could speak as to your character?"

"I know no one here at all," the man replied doggedly.

A small, sombre figure in black detached himself from the crowd at the back of the court. To his surprise, Mervyn recognised Torrita. At the invitation of the *Procureur*, he moved forward.

"I happen to be connected with the Italian Police, *Monsieur le Procureur*," he announced. "Hearing that an Italian had committed an offence, I came down to see if I could identify him."

"Good. And can you?"

Torrita shook his head.

"The man is a stranger to me, sir," he acknowledged.

"Anything to say, prisoner?"

"Nothing, sir," was the blank reply.

There was a rustling of documents. Sentence was pronounced forthwith.

"Six months' imprisonment, and deportation to follow. The court is dismissed."

Mervyn bowed to the *Juge d'Instruction*, bowed to the *Procureur*, and took his leave. On the steps of the Tribunal, Torrita came across and accosted him.

"You permit that I offer my congratulations, Monsieur Amory," he said. "Whether the fellow meant to use his knife or not, you were well out of an awkward situation."

"The trick of carrying knives seems to be quite a common one amongst your country people," Mervyn observed, as he crossed the pavement towards the spot where he had left his two-seater car.

"It is a bad habit," Torrita acknowledged. "It is almost as bad a habit as interference in the serious business of other people."

"Your fellows play the game all right," Mervyn admitted. "The man seemed as though he had never seen you before in his life."

"One does not choose idiots, even for one's tools," Torrita observed coolly. "Your little car? Charming!

I wonder whether I could beg the favour of a lift?"

"With pleasure, if your way is mine," Mervyn acquiesced. "Where do you want to go to?"

Torrita glanced at the clock.

"It is midday," he pointed out. "It would give me great pleasure if you would take a cocktail with me at the Royalty Bar. We shall probably meet the Princess there."

"You are very kind," Mervyn said. "I usually try to get a set of tennis in the morning, but it's rather too late now, I am afraid."

They drove up the hill almost in silence. It was a little early for the popular hour at the Royalty, and only the outside tables were occupied. Torrita touched his companion on the arm, and led him into a room which had recently been opened, and which happened to be empty. They established themselves in easy-chairs.

"Mr. Mervyn Amory," his host began, after he had given the waiter an order for cocktails, "you are a young man."

"Youngish," was the murmured reply. "I'm thirty-three."

"It is a wonderful age," Torrita said. "To be thirty-three, to be possessed of a reasonable fortune, which I have no doubt you have, and to possess also five million francs in French currency, should not be without its attractions for you."

"I'm quite all right as I am—without the five million francs."

"There is another gift which goes with it," Torrita continued, in a low tone. "The gift of life."

Mervyn turned and regarded his companion curiously.

"You are a cold-blooded sort of fellow," he declared.

"Because I speak of life or death without emotion? We, who are the disciples of Matorni, know how to do that."

"It's your infernal persistence that gets me," Mervyn acknowledged. "You can talk and threaten for ever, but after all, you daren't murder me. It couldn't be hushed up—as it would be, without a doubt, if I were one of your own country people. You're full of wrong ideas about me, you know, Torrita. What do you imagine I possess that's worth five million francs to you or any one else?"

"Uguello's papers," Torrita confided.

"You can't be sure I've got them," Mervyn pointed out, "and if I had, you can't be sure that I haven't already parted with them."

"The time when we lacked knowledge is past. You do not suppose that I stay here for nothing."

"I thought that you were working up these frontier affairs," Mervyn remarked. "I notice that when your back is turned to Monte Carlo, and your car travels eastwards, there is generally a flare-up the next day."

"I engage myself in investigating these matters," was the cool reply, "but I have time for other in-

terests. I am interested in you, Signor Amory. I will admit that up till now you have fooled me very perfectly, but that time has gone. I know now that, let us say, up to the hour that you left your hotel to visit the Tribunal, Uguello's papers were in your possession. They still are."

"Pity you can't find them," Mervyn remarked. "Your people have tried hard enough. It wasn't *mille* notes that that poor fellow who is now in Monaco Jail was after, was it? He told his story well enough, but there were two of us there who knew he was lying."

"We waste much time fencing," Torrita remarked, lighting a fresh cigarette. "Let us speak in plain words, Mr. Amory. You shall have five million francs to-day for the packet which Uguello confided to your charge."

"But my dear Signor Torrita," Mervyn expostulated, "one can't break one's trust to a dead man!"

"If you will not deal with me," Torrita threatened, "you will be a dead man yourself before the month is out."

"Well, that's plain speaking, at any rate," Mervyn admitted. "Why are you so sure that I still have the packet?" he asked, suddenly turning towards his companion. "I was in dangerous company last night."

"I know where you were," the other replied contemptuously, "I know where you supped, and with whom, what time you left the Provençal Bar, and

what time the light went out in your sitting room. I do not need to be taught the A.B.C. of my profession. I say that the packet is still with you, and I offer five million francs in cash for its possession."

Mervyn sprang to his feet. He had caught the flutter of a rose-pink skirt in the garden outside.

"The Comtessa!" he cried. "Torrita, the discussion is adjourned—or rather, not adjourned—finished."

Torrita caught his arm as he would have hastened off.

"Better say adjourned," he advised. "You may hear news before the day is out."

CHAPTER XIV

"I HAVE an idea," Mervyn declared, as he leaned out of the open window and gazed down the huge precipitous descent to the Mediterranean below, "that here comes the perfect luncheon. I don't care whether the omelet be tough, or the chicken burned. It is the first luncheon I have ever had alone with you."

"But I am very hungry," Rosetta protested, "and I do not like burnt chicken."

"Nothing of the sort will happen," he assured her. "I have an idea. We commence with these *hors d'œuvres*," he went on, watching their arrangement upon the table, "and we will proceed, course by course, to our coffee, and we will not mention the Blue Train, or any one who was on it, or the politics of any country upon the face of the earth, spies, assassins, or secret documents. Let them all go hang!"

Rosetta laughed happily.

"You are a dear person," she cried. "I am feeling terribly like that, too. Lucilla is wonderful, I adore her; but life only exists for her through Matorni's eyes. She breathes only his atmosphere, dreams his dreams. It is so fortunate that you came along, Mr. Mervyn Amory," she went on, "or I should soon have become a very inhuman person. In Italy I was rather a politician myself," she added, with a momentary gravity. "But for this morning that is fin-

ished. Here we sit up in the skies together, and I am hungry and happy. We put our brains to bed, yes? We talk nonsense."

"Let's eat," Mervyn proposed practically.

"And drink," she added, as the waiter appeared with a flask of Chianti.

"I have discovered," he said presently, "exactly how long it takes to be married in Monte Carlo. If we are married at the English Church, it will be three weeks."

"Three weeks," she reflected. "I really ought to go to Paris for some clothes."

"Jolly good shops in Nice," he suggested, helping himself to another sardine.

"You know nothing whatever about it," she rejoined severely. "I am not coming to you in Nice clothes. My shopping will be done in Florence and Paris."

"You've lots of things already, anyhow," he grumbled. "I wired Bremner, and he's flying out."

"What a man of action," she laughed, "but then, he may be coming out—"

Up went Mervyn's hand. She broke off at once.

"Quite right," she admitted. "You guessed what I was going to say. Dear me, this is getting very difficult. I wanted to ask you whether you would mind spending a few months of every year at my villa near Florence. It is much smaller than my ancestral castle but it is a great deal more comfortable."

"Circumstances permitting," he agreed, a little

grimly, "I shall like it. Rosetta, I don't know much about art."

"I'm a horrible duffer at tennis," she confessed.

"The omelet!" he exclaimed, in a hushed voice. "Steaming, flaky!"

"Delicious!" she murmured. "Mervyn, do you mind if I turn out to be greedy?"

"One of the most important things in the world," he declared, "is for a girl to take an interest in her food. The girls who don't, as a rule, take too many cocktails, smoke Virginian cigarettes, and carry suspicious looking gold bottles in their bags."

"You do know life!" she exclaimed, in a tone of mock reverence.

The waiter who served them with the omelet beamed down upon them benevolently. He was a Monégasque who wandered up to this, the strangest restaurant in the world, during the season. It belonged to his son-in-law, and he took a pride in it, and his clients. It was he who had suggested this ridiculous little extension, which was a sort of annex from the main room. He watched the disappearance of the omelet with delight.

"Are you the patron?" Mervyn asked him.

"My son-in-law," he answered. "My wife makes the cuisine. The omelet was good, yes?"

"Show Madame the dish," was the conclusive reply. "I will pay my respects before we go."

"Wait for the chicken," the man advised, with a wave of the hand, intended to denote ecstasy. "I

chose him myself—the tenderest in the place. They come here from every hotel and restaurant in Monte Carlo for good cooking. My son-in-law he pays high prices for everything, but it is the best."

He left them alone again for a few minutes. The perfume of a drooping mimosa tree floated in through the window, and a linnet was singing lustily from a cypress tree in the middle of the little rose garden. All manner of scents seemed to drift in from the sheer hillside. A thousand feet below was the Château de Roquebrune, like a toy palace amongst its gardens. Rosetta had long since removed her hat, and she leaned across the table, her fingers smoothing down the coils of rich, soft brown hair, her elbows resting lightly upon the cloth.

"Are we terrible people to be lunching up here alone, Mervyn?" she asked him. "In Italy they are so strict. Here, what does it matter—and with you?"

"The man you are going to marry ought to be able to look after you," he observed cheerfully.

She laughed—a gentle, melodious laugh, with underneath a deep note of satisfaction. There was the sound of a car stopping outside. Two men and a girl who had descended from it strolled along the terrace. Mervyn watched their approach curiously.

"The young man and the girl," he confided, leaning across the table, "are professional dancers at the Provençal. Look rather down on their luck, don't they?"

"The other man looks Italian," Rosetta observed. "He seems opulent enough."

The girl walked listlessly. She was showily, yet shabbily, dressed. Her skirts were of the shortest, but her stockings had seen better days, and her shoes, notwithstanding their high heels, were shoddy. Her gown was of rusty black, her green hat had lost its first freshness. Her companion—a pallid-faced youth, wearing a blue serge suit, a little shiny at the seams—needed all his swagger to carry off his frayed linen and cracked patent-leather shoes. The two sank somewhat wearily into chairs just underneath the window. Their companion summoned a waiter.

"I'll give you two some lunch later, when the room's a little clearer," he promised. "It seems to me as quiet a place as we could find upon the Riviera for a little chat, eh? Up in the clouds, almost."

"It's lonely enough," the girl agreed in a tired voice. "If we aren't going to have lunch yet, give me some Dubonnet quick, please."

"I could do with a Dubonnet myself, and a biscuit," the young man remarked, with an attempt at jauntiness.

The host of the little party ordered refreshments, and the girl leaned forward.

"Now, sir," she began—"I'm so sorry, but I always forget your name—we're lonely enough up here, aren't we, as you remarked? What is this

scheme you're wishing on Albert, and is there really any money in it?"

The older man laughed scornfully.

"Money in it!" he repeated. "Listen, you two. How does a hundred thousand francs sound?"

"My God!" the young man muttered feverishly.

"A hundred thousand francs!" the girl gasped.

Rosetta leaned forward in her chair.

"Do you think we ought to cough or something?" she whispered.

Mervyn shook his head.

"Wait a moment," he enjoined in a low tone. "I've seen that fellow with Torrita."

"The money is to be earned," the older man went on, "by a young Frenchman who knows a little Italian, who would place himself absolutely in the hands of my friends, and do exactly what he is told."

"But what sort of a thing has he got to do?" the girl asked. "Is it dangerous?"

"It will seem so at first," was the cool reply. "Can either of you think of any way of earning a hundred thousand francs that has not its dangers?"

"I suppose not," the girl murmured.

"What should I have to do?" the young man asked hoarsely.

"You would have to pretend to shoot some one."

"Hi-yi-yi!" the girl exclaimed.

"But that is an affair!" the young man cried.

"Not so much of an affair," the other argued. "The whole business is to be merely pretence, mind.

You would be given a revolver, in which the first two cartridges were blank. You would fire those off, and then you would be seized."

"And probably torn to pieces," the young man scoffed.

"Not a chance! You would be seized by soldiers and gendarmes who knew all about it, you would be hurried off, kept in prison for a week or two—receiving, mark you, wonderful treatment—and at the end of that time you would be released."

"And the man I am to shoot at?" the dancer asked. "Does he know about it?"

"He does not," was the frank acknowledgment. "It would probably cost me my position if he did. He is as brave as a lion though, and he won't turn a hair. No one but we three will ever know that the two shots you fire are blank."

"And who is he?"

There was a short silence.

"If you don't mind," the Italian suggested, "we'll leave his name out for the moment."

The young man drank down his Dubonnet greedily. The waiter had left the bottle upon the table, and he refilled his glass.

"But what's the idea?" he demanded. "I am not to hurt him, and he is not to know that it is going to happen. Who is going to pay the hundred thousand francs for a pantomime like that?"

"That is not your affair," the Italian said quietly. "The money will be forthcoming all right."

"And the advance beforehand?" the girl ventured timidly.

"Certainly. Ten *milles*, as soon as the thing is settled up."

"There is a table for Monsieur now," a waiter announced, coming out from the restaurant.

The three people rose to their feet and entered the building. Rosetta leaned forward in her chair.

"I always knew this place wasn't real!" she exclaimed. "It is too stagy and melodramatic. Those people did not really exist, did they, Mervyn?"

"They existed all right," he assured her. "I've seen that fat fellow, Paltrina, with Torrita half a dozen times. Can't you see now how history is made, Rosetta? There will be an attack upon Matorni's life. He will comport himself as usual with great bravery. On this occasion he will be in no danger, but he won't know that. It will be discovered that the would-be assassin is either a Frenchman or has been living in France. Probably the same day there will be a frontier incident. There is all your excuse for the war, stage-managed by Signor Torrita, with etceteras by all the rest of them."

She leaned across the table.

"Mervyn," she asked earnestly, "you don't believe for a moment that Matorni knows anything of this?"

"Not a thing. He has got his head in the clouds, but he's a brave man, and I'd swear he'd never stoop to trickery like this. Probably, with a wave of his

hand, he has said grandiloquently to Torrita, 'Produce me a flagrant frontier incident and a wave of patriotic fervour on May 1st.' And Torrita sees to it."

"I think," Rosetta decided, after a moment's reflection, "that we'll buy a yacht, Mervyn, and live at sea."

CHAPTER XV

It is very certain that up to eleven o'clock that evening Mervyn had no idea of going to the Provençal. He had spent the greater part of a long and happy day with Rosetta, and his impulses towards adventure had been very largely diverted into gentler and less dangerous channels. He was beginning to feel that he had had enough of this particular incursion into the land of intrigue. He told himself that he would stay away from all these suspicious places, would try to persuade Rosetta to marry him at once, and return to England without waiting for possible developments in this part of the world, however dramatic and wonderful they might be. Like most men of his age who contemplate marriage for the first time in their lives, the idea carried him almost off his feet. Yet, notwithstanding his deep sense of content, he was afflicted throughout the evening with a thin vein of restlessness. He strolled aimlessly about the Sporting Club, exchanging a few words of gossip now and then with one and another of his tennis friends, venturing an occasional plaque at roulette, but settling down to nothing. At half-past eleven, he strolled along the passage to the hotel with the firm intention of going to his room—and at twelve o'clock, he entered the Provençal! He had scarcely handed his coat and hat to the *vestiaire* before he became aware of an uneasy atmosphere.

Dan, the barman, greeted him with a sort of frightened look, and hastened away to serve some people at the other end of the counter. The proprietor who had welcomed him with so much *empressement* on the previous evening approached him now with laggard footsteps. The leader of the orchestra, apparently forgetful of his hundred-franc note of the night before, turned away to whisper to the 'cello player. The two professional dancers, whom he had seen that morning, up in the restaurant in the clouds, witnessed his arrival and watched him with a sort of startled curiosity.

"Monsieur desires a table?" the proprietor enquired.

"Why not?" Mervyn rejoined, a little annoyed. "I did not come here to stand."

The man led him to the same table which he had occupied on the night before. Mervyn glanced once more round the room.

"Where is Mademoiselle Caterina?" he asked.

There was a brief silence. Mervyn looked up from the menu which he had been studying to find the man watching him from under his half-drooped eyelids.

"Mademoiselle Caterina has not appeared since she left with you last night."

Possibly Mervyn's genuine start reëstablished confidence. The man became half mysterious, half querulous.

"Before you arrived last night," he complained,

—she had become a great success. There were three dancing lessons fixed for this afternoon. Two of my best clients had invited her to supper. She promised nothing about that, except that she would be here. But the dancing lessons—a hundred and fifty francs each!—and she was poor! That we know."

"But where can she be?" Mervyn demanded.

The manager coughed.

"She left here with you, Monsieur, at a quarter to three this morning," he pointed out. "We have not heard of her since."

"There is no secret about our movements," Mervyn declared. "She drove with me to the Hôtel de Paris. She came up to my sitting room, and stayed there certainly not longer than ten minutes. We had one drink. After that she left. I saw her into the lift. She would not allow me to accompany her home. From my balcony I watched her drive away in a little *voiture*. She passed round the square and up past the Gardens. She told me that her apartment was in the Hôtel des Trois Étoiles, up in Beausoleil."

"And Monsieur has not seen or heard from her since?"

"Naturally not. Why should I?"

The proprietor seemed suddenly an older man.

"Would it be too much to ask of Monsieur," he ventured, speaking with a little tremor in his voice, "whether he entrusted Mademoiselle Caterina with any commission?"

"It would be too much to ask of me," Mervyn rejoined.

"We are so near that accursed frontier," the man muttered, looking uneasily around. "One never knows from night to night who one's guests may be. If they should come—my God, it would be quick death for some of us!"

"If who should come?"

"The Italian army, the Black Shirts of Matorni."

"It seems to me," Mervyn said soothingly, "that you are suffering from a fit of nerves just because Mademoiselle Caterina has not appeared this evening."

"Or this afternoon," the proprietor reminded him. "And what about you, Signor? What did you come for this evening, except to see whether she were here? I watched your face when you looked round the room, and found that she was absent, when I told you that she had not been seen. What about you, then, Signor? I saw your face. You were afraid. You were afraid, as I am afraid—afraid for her, afraid for us. I wish I had never reopened this place. I wish I had gone farther into France—a great deal farther."

"Supposing," Mervyn suggested gently, "you bring me a bottle of wine, cease working yourself up into a fever, and, if Mademoiselle Caterina does not arrive before, say two o'clock, we will send a little note up to her lodgings and enquire about her."

"It is an idea," the proprietor admitted.

He departed, and returned in a moment or two, carrying a bottle of the most expensive champagne. The old instincts had reasserted themselves.

"Pardon, if I ask another question, Signor," he murmured, leaning forward. "There has been no mistake about this? It was the Signor who was in the Blue Train when Uguello was murdered?"

"I was, most unfortunately, there," Mervyn acknowledged, "and I have been in trouble about it ever since."

"Signor," the little man pleaded, "I am Uguello's cousin; I am an exile from Italy; I, and every one else here, are of the Cause. Relieve us of our anxiety, I beg. Did Mademoiselle Caterina leave you with the papers?"

Mervyn sipped his wine thoughtfully. He felt himself in a quandary.

"Do you suspect Mademoiselle Caterina?" he enquired. "Was she one of you?"

"Heart and soul," the man exclaimed. "What I fear is that she, too, has gone to swell the list of victims of these bloody Fascists. They call us the Red Shirts, the underworld of murderers, and they themselves kill coldly where and whenever the removal of a man or a woman will advance their cause. It is for Caterina first I fear; it is for what threatens afterwards that I am terrified, when they know that it was here she met you. Their guns could reach us from the frontier. The roads behind would be

blocked, the mountains invested. There would be no escape."

Mervyn finished his glass of wine.

"Listen, my friend," he proposed. "We will not wait until two o'clock. I will take a carriage to the hotel of Mademoiselle—the Hôtel des Trois Étoiles in Beausoleil. I will find out what has happened to her, and I will return."

"Ah, but that is a better idea than the other," the proprietor admitted, with a faint return to cheerfulness.

"In the meantime, do not worry," Mervyn begged. "If Mademoiselle is to be trusted, all may still be well; if she is not—well, all is not yet lost."

Mervyn passed out of the restaurant without waiting for his coat and hat, summoned a *voiture*, gave the address, and was driven up the hill to Beausoleil. The Hôtel des Trois Étoiles was not in the best part of that thickly populated district. It was situated in a side street, which ended in a blank passage and a precipitous ascent. Nevertheless there were lights burning and people seated in the café. He entered a dimly lit hall and tapped at a window. After a few moments' delay a woman appeared.

"It is for the *concierge*," Mervyn enquired.

"We keep none," was the curt reply. "It is not necessary. We have only a few chambers. Monsieur desires?"

"A word with Mademoiselle Caterina."

The woman gave vent to an ejaculation—some-

thing in the nature of a snort. She was fat and large, dark and untidy. She had dined from a dish strongly savoured with garlic. Mervyn drew a little farther away.

"For Mademoiselle Caterina, indeed!" she repeated unpleasantly. "It is of Madamoiselle Caterina herself that we should like to know. She is a *danseuse*, it is true, but even a *danseuse* should return when her work is finished. Not since she left here at four o'clock yesterday afternoon have we set eyes upon Mademoiselle."

"She did not return last night?" Mervyn demanded.

"I have said it. She did not return. She has not returned. Where is she? I ask that of you—I to whom she owes money for board and rooms."

Mervyn considered for a moment.

"Madame," he said, "give me her bill, and I will settle it."

"She owes a hundred and seventy francs," the woman announced glibly, "and glad I shall be to get it."

Mervyn counted out the money, which she grabbed.

"And who might you be, Monsieur?" she demanded. "There is likely enough to be trouble with the police when this affair is known. Young women are not allowed to disappear in Monaco."

"It does not matter about my name," Mervyn replied. "I am an Englishman and well known. I have

an apartment at the Hôtel de Paris. Mademoiselle visited me for a few minutes after leaving the Provençal Bar. I myself saw her step into a *voiture* at the Paris at five minutes past three. I heard her give this address—the Hôtel des Trois Étoiles—and I watched her driven up the hill."

"It is a fine story," Madame scoffed; "yet Mademoiselle Caterina did not return—she has not returned. And, mark you, she was possessed of jewellery. That I know, for she left here wearing it."

Mervyn stepped a little farther away from the window. The atmosphere of the place stifled him. He fancied, too, that the voices in the adjoining café had ceased, as though every one were listening.

"Will you allow me to inspect the apartments of Mademoiselle?" he asked. "They are already paid for," he added, pointing to the money which the woman was clutching.

"But certainly not," she refused. "It is I myself who will examine them. It is a case for the police, this."

"I also am of that opinion, Madame," Mervyn assented gravely. "Since you prefer, I will fetch a gendarme."

"A gendarme!" she screamed. "You would bring the police to a respectable house!"

"Mount with me yourself then," Mervyn insisted. "I intend to assure myself of the fact that Mademoiselle has not returned."

The woman took a key from a peg and waddled

out—a sagging mass of unwieldy flesh. She cast a spiteful glance upon Mervyn.

"Follow me," she directed.

She climbed in awkward fashion up the narrow stairs, breathing stertorously. Arrived on the first floor, she knocked on the nearest door. There was no reply. She turned to Mervyn.

"Monsieur beholds! Neither has there been any bell all day. If Mademoiselle had been within, would she not have rung for her coffee, her *déjeuner?*"

"Nevertheless," Mervyn suggested, "if that is a pass key in your hand, open the door, and let us see for ourselves."

The woman was in the act of inserting the key, when something seemed to attract her attention. She stooped down, closed one eye, and looked through the keyhole with the other. When she stood up, she was afraid.

"The light is on," she gasped. "It must have been on all day. Something then has happened."

"Open the door and let us see," Mervyn insisted.

The woman stepped back.

"That I will not do," she objected. "It is so easy to get into trouble. Wait till I call the patron."

She shouted down the stairs, and presently a cumbrous-looking man, in shirt and trousers only, with braces pushed aside from his shoulders and hanging down, opened the door from the café and stepped into the passage.

"Hurry, thou lazy one!" the woman cried out.

"Something has happened here in the chamber of Mademoiselle."

He came puffing up the stairs.

"The light is going," Madame pointed out. "Monsieur here says that Mademoiselle started home from the Hôtel de Paris at three o'clock this morning. Who should tell that? We were all in bed. When no bell has sounded all the day, does one expect to find Mademoiselle in her room? Open then, Monsieur."

Mervyn turned the key and pushed open the door. The electric light was burning. Mademoiselle's cloak lay in a heap upon the floor, and Mademoiselle lay straight and rigid upon the bed. She was still wearing her red dress. A long envelope, torn open, from which some blank papers obtruded, lay upon her side. Through them, and into her body, a long, ordinary-shaped knife had been thrust almost to the hilt. She had apparently died quite peacefully, for, except for the terrified gleam in her still ghastly, opened eyes, her features were free from any contortion. She lay in almost a natural attitude.— Madame gave one horrible shriek and collapsed. Monsieur, after a string of profane oaths, shouted downstairs for every one indiscriminately. Mervyn took the receiver from the telephone instrument which stood in the room and telephoned to the Bureau of the Police.

CHAPTER XVI

Mervyn's peaceful departure from the Hôtel des Trois Étoiles seemed for a few moments problematical. When, after some delay, he came down the stairs, there were two or three unkempt-looking loiterers in the café and doorway of the hotel, who eyed him in evil fashion. He heard Madame from upstairs shout out something in shrill dialect, but there was no response. He passed out unmolested, although their foul breaths were upon his cheeks, and resumed his seat in the carriage.

"Back to the Provençal Bar," he ordered.

The man whipped his horses. Perhaps it was as well, for the sight of the arriving gendarmes seemed to have maddened the little company in the café. Several more of the latter had appeared now from the inner obscurity, and one particularly villainous-looking youth was slinking across the pavement. Mervyn glanced back at them over his shoulder. For a long time he remembered the vista of the café with its dimly burning light and its disreputable occupants—men with the lust of assault in their eyes and movements, yet a little cowed, like rats not yet altogether at bay. And in the room upstairs, Caterina, with the peaceful look in her face, but the terror in her eyes, and that hideous inch of steel showing above the stained papers.

The carriage swung round the corner into the crowded streets, and Mervyn breathed more freely.

They were waiting for him anxiously in the Provençal Bar. The place had filled up during his absence, and there was now scarcely a vacant seat. Ferrari followed him to his table, and, in response to Mervyn's invitation, diffidently seated himself.

"Ferrari," Mervyn said, "you will have to prepare yourself for a shock. Keep as cool as you can. See, I shall pour you out a glass of wine."

The man's hands were beginning to tremble. Mervyn filled the two glasses and drank half of his own at a single gulp.

"They told me at first at the hotel," he recounted, "that Mademoiselle Caterina did not return at all last night. I insisted upon seeing her room, and we found her there, still in her last night's evening clothes, stabbed. She had been quite dead for many hours."

"*Jésu Maria!*" Ferrari gasped.

"We have to face it," Mervyn went on. "It was a shock to me as well as to you. I sent for the police, and they have put a seal on everything."

"The papers!" Ferrari asked anxiously. "They have the papers which you handed to her?"

"Yes, they have those," Mervyn admitted dryly. "I should not let that worry you very much, Ferrari. It is the tragedy to Mademoiselle which one has to deplore."

"Naturally," the other groaned. "Yet how can one help a thought for oneself. All here was going so well. A little fortune, Monsieur—it was a little

fortune that awaited us! Then I listened to a word from the headquarters where I used to belong. It seemed simple to bring you and Caterina together. And now, we are betrayed."

"Listen," Mervyn said firmly. "You must sit up and face this thing like a man. All your clients will wonder what has happened to you, and I have still something left to tell. No, you need not look so apprehensive. This time it is not bad news."

"Proceed, Signor—I beg you to proceed."

"Neither the gendarmes nor any one else will gain any satisfaction whatever from the papers which I handed to Mademoiselle Caterina. Whoever killed her had already arrived at that conclusion. That is why the dagger with which the poor girl was stabbed had fastened those papers to her body."

"As yet," Ferrari admitted, "I do not understand."

"I came here in response to your card of invitation," Mervyn went on, "which contained, as you know, certain private marks which I recognized, and which gave me to understand that I should meet here the person to whom I could legitimately pass on Uguello's papers."

"I know," Ferrari muttered. "The final 'e' and the smudge."

"But," Mervyn proceeded, dropping his voice a little, "there was also an additional test—a word which the recipient was to pronounce before I parted

with the papers. Caterina did not use that word. She used another."

The little man sat up in his chair. His eyes seemed to be starting out of his head.

"She did not use the word!" he exclaimed.

"The one she used was not the right one."

Ferrari held his head for a moment. Just then he did not care if the whole roomful of people thought him mad.

"Then what did the Signor do?" he demanded.

"I gave her a packet very much like the real thing, which I had kept prepared for such an emergency," Mervyn replied. "It contained sheets of plain paper only, and it is all Torrita's agent would have obtained if he had succeeded in robbing me in the Sporting Club passage last night. She went off with it, poor child, quite happily. It was all I had to give her."

Ferrari accepted another glass of wine. By degrees some of his courage seemed to be returning.

"She had not the password," he repeated to himself. "Caterina had not the password. My God, if she, too, were a spy!"

"I have asked myself that question," Mervyn admitted. "She wasn't an old hand, because she was terribly nervous. If she was a Fascist spy, Ferrari, she hasn't done you much harm, for the poor child never had the chance. If she is one of your people, who made a genuine mistake, then again you are still safe, because I did not part with the papers."

Ferrari drained his glass and stood up.

"The Signor has shown discretion," he admitted.

"Which do you think she was?" Mervyn asked.

Ferrari hesitated.

"Our people do not choose women who make mistakes," he said. "By to-morrow I will tell the Signor."

He bowed himself away. Mervyn joined some friends in a distant corner of the room and tried his best to adapt himself to their mood. They were all a a little excited over some recent news.

"Looks as though our tournament were going to be a pretty poor show, Amory," Colonel Fenton, who was of the party, observed.

"Why, what's happened?" Mervyn enquired.

"Every Italian has scratched," Fenton told him —"ordered back home, and both the French officers —De Seurgui and Mayotte. They left for Marseilles this afternoon."

CHAPTER XVII

At nine o'clock on the following morning, Mervyn was awakened by the telephone ringing at his elbow. He answered the summons sleepily.

"Hullo! Who's there?"

"It is I—Rosetta. Do I speak with Mr. Mervyn Amory?"

"You do," Mervyn acknowledged; "with as much of him as is awake."

"The Princess is inviting you to dinner to-night at the Château at nine o'clock."

"Good. I am quite free, and I may be hungry by that time."

"I have rung up," Rosetta continued earnestly, "to beg you not to come. I am serious, Mervyn. You must please make some excuse."

"I say, doesn't this sound a little inhospitable?" he protested, now thoroughly awake.

"I beg of you not to be foolish," was the grave reply. "They have given up treating me with confidence, because I believe they think that we are too friendly, but Torrita was here last night till late, and I am quite sure that it was you whom they were discussing. You will find, when you get up—if you get up at all this morning—that things have taken a serious turn. The Princess' dinner party is not meant to afford you much in the way of entertainment."

"Are you going to be there?"

"Naturally."

"Then I shall come."

"But you must not. I think that Torrita is beginning to find out that he has been deceived in you, and he is very angry. He does not like to make mistakes, that man."

"I am a little annoyed with Torrita myself," Mervyn rejoined; "that is to say, if I'm figuring things out correctly. At what hour did you say this festivity was? Nine o'clock?"

"At nine o'clock," was the reluctant assent.

"Then will you please tell the Princess that she can count upon me," Mervyn begged. "If you want to argue the matter, don't do it on the telephone, with half a dozen people probably listening in, but come and have lunch with me."

"Impossible! Lucilla and I are going to Cannes."

"Then tea at the Sporting Club at five o'clock," he suggested. "I can't be all day without seeing you."

"If I come," Rosetta warned him impressively, "it will only be to save you from a very foolish action. You will have to go to bed with a very bad cold."

"I feel it coming on already," was the prompt reply. "At five o'clock then. Good-by!"

In a few minutes Mervyn rose, bathed, made a leisurely toilet, and was ready for the services of his barber when the latter arrived at ten o'clock. René was not his usual cheerful self. He was care-

ful to close the bedroom door before commencing operations.

"Monsieur Amory," he said, after a few minutes' complete silence, "there is something I should like to ask you. Have you enemies in this place?"

"Not that I know of."

"Any one, *par example*," René continued, "whom you have beaten at your great game, and who would be likely to bear you malice?"

"Not a chance," Mervyn assured him. "They're a good sporting lot down there, and they don't go in for that sort of thing. Why do you ask?"

"It is a more serious matter then," René declared anxiously.

"What is a more serious matter?" Mervyn demanded. "Has any one been trying to bribe you to cut my throat?"

"Monsieur Amory," René proceeded, "I would rather not tell you. I am very worried, but you see that I make for myself a compromise. The person who approached me is very influential. I declined to listen to what he had to say. If he thought that I had warned you, I should be turned out of the Principality. Monsieur will understand from that I can say nothing. I declined the offer. I have given you a warning. So I do no harm to any one, and I hope I will be left alone."

"Pretty sound, René," Mervyn admitted. "By-the-by, you're not an Italian, by any chance, are you?"

"I am *not*, Monsieur," was the emphatic denial. "I would ask you, Monsieur Amory, to consider my name. I am French—nothing but French. I have never been in Italy, and I do not like Italians."

He continued his operations for a time without remark.

"Monsieur will pardon a word of caution?" he asked abruptly, after he had applied the first hot towel.

"By all means."

"Monsieur has no other interest in life but as a player of tennis?"

"No occupation, if that is what you mean? No shadow of one. I did think of becoming a barber—"

"Monsieur jests," René interrupted severely. "Believe me, it is not a matter to be treated lightly. There is a gentleman of great influence in the Principality from whom I heard that Monsieur had placed himself in a very dangerous position."

"Must be mixing me up with some one," Mervyn suggested.

"The gentleman," René protested gloomily, "is not one who makes mistakes."

"Well, he's made one now, if it is for the first time in his life," Mervyn declared. "You can assure him of that, with my compliments, René. I am going to knock the little tennis ball about for the rest of the day, and nothing else, believe me. That reminds me, don't be later than eight to-night. I dine out in high society."

"I shall be punctual, Monsieur," René promised.

The barber, in due course, took his leave, and Mervyn, having completed his toilet, strolled across to the tennis courts. He looked about him in surprise. The place was almost deserted.

"Hullo, what's wrong?" he asked Colonel Fenton, who was standing with his hands in his pockets, staring disconsolately at the courts.

"Well, every Italian in the place went off at nine o'clock this morning, to commence with," was the lugubrious reply.

"Went off where?" Mervyn demanded. "What's it all about?"

"Summoned back to Italy. The order of recall wasn't from the military authorities at all, either. It was a civil order, signed by Matorni. I suppose he thinks they're all spending too much money out of the country. Damned tyranny, I call it! The fellow's lost his head. Seen the *Éclaireur?*"

"Not yet. I was lazy this morning."

"There are two more frontier incidents. A score of Italian Fascists seem to have run amok and smashed nearly every window in the French Consulate. They hung Italian flags round the place and stayed there fooling for hours. The worst of it is there seems to be a sort of system creeping into these affairs. It's just as though Italy were deliberately trying to be offensive. They'll get what they're asking for, if they don't look out. You should read the leading article in the *Éclaireur.*"

Mervyn shuddered.

"What have I done to you, Colonel?" he remonstrated. "And after all, what does it matter? It's only a little letting off steam on both sides."

Fenton grunted sardonically.

"That's the way you young fellows talk, of course," he said. "You don't think anything in the world is serious, so long as your courts are in good condition, and your tennis is here waiting for you. I've got my job to think about. A nice thing it would be if we had fifty thousand French troops through here, cutting up the place, and all the visitors stayed away."

"You don't imagine that such a thing is even remotely possible, do you?" Mervyn asked, taking out his case and lighting a cigarette.

"It doesn't seem reasonable, and yet I have a theory of my own about Matorni," Fenton went on earnestly. "He's been so damned successful, he's got such a hold upon the nation, that he thinks he can do exactly what he likes with her. Internally, he's set her on her feet again. There's nothing more to be done that way, for a time. Then he begins to look outside, and the longer he looks outside, the more the Imperialistic fever burns in his veins. He has had a shot at Africa and found it no good. He has looked longingly Eastward but there's no real scope there. He wants lands where the money lies, where the revenue is. To look this way is enough to fire any one's ambition—a man of the type of Matorni,

you know. I don't know whether you realise it, Amory, but the whole country here—all the way from Mentone to Nice—is far more Italian than French. What a triumph to bring it back to the Italian flag! If Matorni could do that, he might well call himself the greatest patriot Italy has ever produced. Cæsar, Rienzi, Garibaldi, they would none of them be in it. It's just the sort of idea to take root in the mind of a man who is half genius, half lunatic."

"Not much of the lunatic about Matorni," Mervyn protested.

"No, but there will be soon, if he goes on the way he's going."

"In the meantime," Mervyn suggested, "I need exercise. Is there any one about at all?"

"Oh, yes, there are half a dozen of them in the pavilion," Fenton answered, turning away a little impatiently. "You young people of this generation tire me though. You don't seem to have a serious thought in life."

Mervyn made his way calmly to the dressing rooms.

"The Colonel's got the pip," he announced. "No reason why we shouldn't have a set, is there, even if the *Éclaireur* is launching thunderbolts?"

A set was quickly arranged, and the chosen four strolled out on to the court.

"The Colonel is an old woman," Mervyn's partner declared, after they had tossed. "Even if there was

a frontier scrap it would never lead to anything—nothing that we should be dragged into, anyway. I think any English statesman who proposed England's going to war to defend another country would be lynched to-day. We've had some!"

"Too much!" growled an elderly man from the other side. "Income and super-tax at seven bob in the pound, no trade, strikes always threatening, living so infernally dear we're driven out of the country! Next time there's a scrap, I hope we watch the fighting and come in at the peacemaking. Now then, young fellow, you serve."

They played three sets. Just as they were finishing, Colonel Fenton, who had gone out to one of the kiosks to buy some newspapers, returned.

"You fellows think I'm an old fogey, I know," he greeted them, "but I want to tell you something. The Paris express has just gone out carrying twice her complement. The attendants simply couldn't keep the people off. They're standing in the corridors all the way from the guard's van to the engine. The *concierge* at the Paris told me that he could make ten times the price of any Blue Train tickets he had to sell during the next fourteen days. That isn't all. You know those excursion automobiles that run to Nice and all over the place. They're every one called in and labelled Paris. Fifty pounds a seat. What do you think of that? The hotel proprietors have got the wind up, I can tell you."

An international tennis player, who had held a

commission in the army, looked grave for a moment.

"If there's anything in the world I'd hate," he confessed, "it would be to go back to soldiering."

"Don't you bother," his late partner said consolingly. "If France and Italy scrap, which I don't believe they ever will, they'll do it alone this time. England would never be drawn into such a fool quarrel, and there isn't any other nation ready to fight, or able to, for that matter. If people are scared, let them go. This place gets too jolly full in the height of the season—can't get a court for love or money sometimes, even by bribing our competent secretary. Come along, Colonel! We'll take you up to the Royalty and give you a drink."

The Colonel grinned and prepared to accompany them.

"Some day you brainless young fellows, like you, Mullingar, and Amory here, will learn to listen to wisdom when you hear it," he observed.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Royalty Bar was more than usually crowded when the contingent from La Festa arrived. The first moments of a sensational scare, however grave its import, are always full of morbidly pleasurable excitement, and the bare possibility of serious trouble between two great countries in their immediate vicinity was sufficient to produce all manner of thrills amongst this little company of holiday-makers. The number and nature of the rumours flying about were almost incredible. Francis and Guido, doyens of barkeepers, did their best to preserve a sane atmosphere, but for that hour, at any rate, the sensationalists triumphed. It was reported authoritatively that the whole railway system from Marseilles to Mentone had been commandeered by the French Government from the ensuing morning, that an army of Italians, which had been kept judiciously hidden, was already massing upon the frontier, that the Middle and Upper Corniche roads were blocked with artillery, and that an ultimatum had been delivered by the French Government. From other quarters it transpired that Matorni had accepted the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Army, and, with his Chief of the Staff, was expected to head the attacking forces. To give a more piquant air to this orgy of senationalism, it was also reported that grave mutinies had broken out amongst the French armies,

and a general disaffection was in existence amongst all classes. France had been promised peace for a century, and the French soldier whose forebears had escaped the massacres of Verdun had no fancy for plunging afresh into the holocaust of battle.

In one corner of the open-air bar, a very distinguished company—consisting of the Princess di Panini, with Torrita, Rosetta, and an English duke and duchess newly arrived that morning—had ensconced themselves. The Princess summoned Mervyn with an imperative little wave of her parasol.

"I suppose," she said, as he bent over her fingers, "that this is the way madmen fire the sparks that kindle war. You have heard all these rumours, of course. Have you ever come across anything more absurd?"

"Never," Mervyn agreed emphatically.

"You have a great many friends here," she went on—"more than I have. Do please use your influence with them. I am in a position to assure you that there is not the remotest chance—not the slightest fear of war."

"I am entirely of your opinion," Mervyn concurred. "The sensationalists must have their hour, though."

"Every one of you who gossip with the crowd has influence," the Princess continued. "Please do your best to discourage this panicky talk. You dine with us to-night?"

"Mr. Amory was not sure this morning," Rosetta

put in. "How is your cold, Mr. Amory? You do not look well."

Mervyn, the picture of health, after his three sets of tennis, laughed quietly.

"I shall make the struggle," he decided gallantly.

"At nine o'clock," the Princess reminded him.

Mervyn turned to rejoin his friends, but paused suddenly upon the tiled pavement. A huge open touring car, covered with dust and mud, swung round the corner and drew up at the entrance to the bar. Bremner, divesting himself of some outer garments, descended, and greeted Mervyn with a wave of the hand.

"Just arrived from Marseilles," he announced, taking the young man by the arm. "Glad to be back again, too. Rotten weather in England. How's the tennis?"

"Pretty well bust up," Mervyn replied. "They're all talking about war."

Bremner laughed derisively.

"What rubbish!" he exclaimed. "I want a long drink, Mervyn. I could keep the dust out of my eyes, but not my throat. Hullo, Fenton!" he went on, as they passed the tennis group. "See you this afternoon, I hope."

"How was it you motored from Marseilles, sir?" Mervyn asked.

"Trains all six or eight hours late," Bremner confided, lowering his voice a little. "All silly rot, of course!"

"Is there going to be war?" Mervyn ventured, as they reached their corner.

"Not if France can help it," was the cautious reply. "Not unless Matorni's turned madman. That's the only danger. Any news from your end?"

Mervyn shook his head.

"This place reeks with melodrama," he declared. "Real drama, too, for the matter of that. There was a poor little *danseuse* stabbed the other night with whom I had spent the evening, because they thought she had Uguello's papers."

"Where are they?"

"Still with me, worse luck! No one's given the right credentials for them yet."

"It's a pity," Bremner sighed. "The surest way of stopping trouble would be for those papers to reach the right hands in Italy."

Bremner's long drink was brought to him, and the two men settled down in their corner. The crowd was thinning now, and they were practically alone.

"I had to stay over in Paris," Bremner confided. "The Prime Minister insisted upon it that we let France have it in black and white. It is impossible for us to embark upon any sort of military enterprise at the present. We have had enough of snatching the chestnuts out of the fire for other people, and another war would mean complete ruination. We are pulling every string that's possible in Germany, but I'll tell you about that later. Anyway, I don't think those three hundred aeroplanes will

materialise quite according to plan. If Italy attacks France, and we can keep Germany quiet, they must fight it out between them. Politically, we haven't any concern in these lands."

"I'd rather hear you say that to me in this corner, sir, than in Parliament," Mervyn confessed. "The one thing which would buck Matorni up more than anything else in the world would be the certainty that we weren't coming in."

"He'll learn nothing from our press, or from the answers to questions in the House of Commons," Bremner declared. "Naturally we're lying doggo. There's only one thing we can do to keep the peace, and that's in train. I won't speak about it even to you, Mervyn. I suppose the people are all crazy down here?"

"Off their heads! Your coming may do a bit of good, especially if you start tennis right away, and give a few parties. In my opinion, though," Mervyn went on thoughtfully, "no outside influence is going to do much good. The only people who might be able to stop trouble, as you suggest—and only if they know the truth in time—are the anti-Fascists, the Red Shirts. That's why I've been hoping that some one would turn up to whom I could hand over the papers."

"I wonder if they are sufficiently organised?" Bremner speculated. "With no press, and no public meetings allowed, they must find it pretty difficult to carry on."

"I believe they're a great deal stronger than we've any idea of," Mervyn confided. "Of course their Secret Service can't compare with Matorni's, or they'd have reached me long before now. I'd go right through to Rome myself, and see what I could do, but it wouldn't be the slightest use, for, with the people who matter, like Torrita, I've used up my bluff about being Amory, the tennis player. I couldn't cross the frontier on any pretext whatever —at any rate with any chance of returning—and so far no emissary from the Red Shirts has been able to get near me."

"What about this dancing girl you spoke of?"

"I'm afraid there's no sort of doubt about her," Mervyn replied. "She was one of Torrita's creatures, pretending that she came from the Red Shirts. She failed to give the correct symbol, and all that she got, poor child, was a packet of blank papers from me and a dagger through her heart from the Red Shirts."

Bremner shuddered.

"It's a rotten trick," he declared, "of any political party, to make use of that sort of person. Secret Service work's a game for men. By-the-by, didn't I see Torrita as I came in?"

"You did," Mervyn assented. "And I'm beginning to flatter myself that he's staying down here to watch me. I believe he realises just what we do—that the greatest danger Matorni could have to contend with would be if the Red Shirt people got hold of Ugu-

ello's papers. Five million francs is his price. He offered it to me yesterday.—Be careful, sir! Here's the Princess! I thought she'd left."

Lucilla, very beautiful, very elegant, very gracious, swept into the room with Rosetta by her side. Instinctively one or two men, as she passed their tables, half rose to their feet. Not only were they two very striking women, but the Princess had the *grand air.*

"My dear Milord Bremner, so you are back with us again!" she exclaimed. "It is a great pleasure to see you."

"It is a great pleasure to be back, Princess," Lord Bremner rejoined.

"Will you tell me, please," the Princess continued, "the office which you hold in the English Government? It has been a subject for discussion outside. I, for my part, declare it to be Secretary of State for War."

"And you are right, Princess," Bremner acknowledged. "That is precisely the position I do hold. It is of little importance, perhaps, in these days, but it gives one a seat in the Cabinet."

The Princess smiled with an air of triumph.

"It is what I have been saying to my foolish friends outside," she declared. "How, if serious things were pending, would it be possible for the War Secretary of England—a country which is concerned with every upheaval—to be out here holiday-making?"

"Not only that," Lord Bremner added, with a twinkle in his eyes, "but you can also assure your friends that I am here with a very excellent conscience."

"You make me so happy," the Princess confessed. "A week or two ago," she went on, dropping her voice a little, "there were clouds, it is true. Even Matorni, who is a man of peace, was shaken, but those clouds have passed. Is it not so, Lord Bremner? You are of my opinion too, are you not, Mr. Amory?"

"Personally I think, like most of my country people," Lord Bremner pronounced, without a tremor, "that Matorni is too great a man and too sane a statesman to plunge his country into a purposeless war."

The Princess quivered a little, but the smile remained.

"That, I felt sure, would be the view of the English nation. Lord Bremner, I believe you have never met my cousin. Let me present you. Lord Bremner—Comtessa di Maureatti. I hope you will pay me that promised call before leaving this time."

There was a little general conversation, and the two ladies took their leave.

"What a delightful young woman, the Comtessa!" Lord Bremner remarked, as they returned to their places.

Mervyn made frantic signals to Guido. His companion looked at him enquiringly.

"Two of the best cocktails in the world, Guido," Mervyn ordered, "to drink the health of the girl I am some day going to marry," he concluded, turning towards his companion.

CHAPTER XIX

That afternoon was showery, the Sporting Club was crowded, and the morning's unrest seemed to have become intensified. Amongst a number of rumours, one or two facts were plainly stated. A French aeroplane, flying high over the Italian frontier, had been fired at unsuccessfully, had completed its survey, and had signalled by wireless to Nice that it was going through to Paris with information of great importance. A portion of the Italian fleet was sailing down the Adriatic, and at Genoa there was great and mysterious activity. In the Sporting Club, Bremner, who had been having tea with Mervyn and Rosetta, pointed out a curious influx of Germans.

"Where have all these fellows come from?" he asked. "I didn't see one of them when I left."

"Descended from the clouds, I should think, literally," Mervyn replied. "There isn't one of them I've seen before, but I'm certain that most of them are Flying Corps men. I know the stamp. What on earth they're doing here, though, all of a sudden, I can't imagine."

"Parnouste would be interested," Bremner reflected. "By-the-by, where is the General, Mervyn?"

"Up La Turbie way. I expect he has some one down here, though, to let him know how things are going on."

Mullingar, the tennis player, strolled up to them.

"Seen the German aviators?" he asked. "The place seems full of them."

Mervyn nodded.

"As bumptious as ever—one or two of them, at any rate," he remarked. "Listen to that fellow over there, cursing the waiter because he hasn't got just the right sort of cakes."

They looked across at the opposite table where, amongst a little group of stalwart, but otherwise inoffensive-looking young men, a close-cropped, flaxen-haired Teuton, of a type happily less common than in the days before the war, was almost shouting at a civil but supercilious waiter.

"We will teach you half-bred Franco-Italians something before many months are gone," he exclaimed furiously. "There are plenty of good Germans to take your place. You shall sweep the streets—"

The young man broke off in the middle of his abuse. There was a little touch upon his arm. A slight man in a frock coat with straggly brown beard, mild features and courteous air stood by his side.

"Monsieur has his card of admission?" he enquired.

"Card of admission—of course I have," the German replied, drawing it from his waistcoat pocket and holding it out. "There you are. Captain von

Artein, if you want to know my name. German—and I am proud of it. You will see more of us before long."

The mild-mannered man had strong fingers, for he ripped the card in two and threw the fragments into an ash tray.

"Monsieur will be so good as to leave," he enjoined.

"Leave?" the young man sputtered.

The rest of his sentence was almost incoherent. His interlocutor listened for only a few seconds. He raised his fingers, and as though they had stepped out of the walls, there were three attendants round the German. His arms were suddenly held, he was out of the room, down the stairs, and in the street, in a matter of seconds. The little man passed on, unruffled. He paused for a single moment, to look at some of the companions of the ejected man. No challenge from them, however, reached him.

"Wonderful!" Rosetta murmured.

"I take off my hat to the little man," Mullingar acknowledged. "I hope to God we're not going to have that crowd down again. Is there going to be war anyway, Lord Bremner?"

Bremner shrugged his shoulders.

"There's always a chance," he acknowledged, "when two nations get worked up like this, but personally I think not. Hot air, most of it."

"Nice jam we should be in here, if anything did happen," Mullingar remarked. "The people are go-

ing away by carloads, and even then they say the roads are blocked the other side of Nice."

Rosetta rose suddenly to her feet.

"The atmosphere of this place chokes me," she complained. "Let us invite Lord Bremner to take a stroll along the Terrace."

Bremner was busy counting a pile of plaques, which he had just acquired.

"You young people go," he suggested good-humouredly. "You must have plenty to talk about. I've thought out a new system at roulette, coming down in the train. It may be expensive, but it has to do with numbers, and it intrigues me."

"Don't part with all your currency, sir," Mervyn advised him, as they turned to leave. "We may want it badly, if things come to the worst."

Bremner smiled.

"I've induced your amiable bank manager to cash me a cheque this afternoon," he confided. "I have plenty of money, but I thought I had better be on the safe side. And with a system—one never knows!"

Rosetta and Mervyn found their way out on to the famous promenade, now almost deserted in the swiftly deepening twilight. They passed the blaze of the Casino and leaned over the parapet to watch the lights of the steamers on the horizon. The air was soft with the recent rain. One or two stars were beginning to find their way into the sky.

"I hope," Rosetta murmured, as she took her

companion's arm, "that all your English connections are as nice as Lord Bremner."

"I think you'll like most of them," he assured her. "I know they'll adore you."

She sighed happily. A large tourist steamer, packed with passengers, was slowly passing between the red and green lights of the harbour.

"I'm half inclined to wish that we were joining in the rush," she murmured. "If it wasn't for leaving Lucilla, I should be delighted to get away from it all."

"I've had enough," Mervyn admitted. "There won't be much tennis after to-morrow or the next day, and I'm beginning to feel rather like a pawn, hanging round here for Torrita's men to play with. If those Italian beggars are up to the game at all, I wish they'd send their certified ambassador along."

She shivered a little.

"Mervyn," she confided, "I have an idea that that is what is going to happen."

He looked down at her. She was very serious indeed.

"Torrita is redoubling his efforts to-day," she went on. "He has a score of men at the frontier, and they're all round Monte Carlo. There were two whom I recognised in the Sporting Club. One of them is solemnly promenading the Terrace now. I think that Torrita has had news."

"Come, this sounds interesting," Mervyn declared.

She made a little grimace.

"Interesting to you," she complained, "because you get all the adventure, and I get nothing but the anxiety. I very nearly went to Lucilla to-day and told her everything—about us. Then it seemed to me that if I did that, they would none of them say a word before me, and I might not be able to warn you if anything alarming happened."

"But after all, Lucilla is your cousin," Mervyn reminded her, "and I'm pretty well one of the family."

"Her own father and mother, if they were alive," Rosetta confided, "would count for nothing with Lucilla beside Matorni. She has poured her life into his. He is her man and her god. The lives of all of us would count for nothing to her, compared to a single injury to him."

"It sounds," he confessed, "as though your cousin Lucilla were as much in love with Matorni as I am with you."

She pressed his arm affectionately.

"But seriously, Mervyn, an air of crisis exists at the Château. Torrita really believes that the great effort to get Uguello's papers is to be made within the next twenty-four hours. Hence this dinner. I think that I have been very weak, Mervyn. I ought to have refused to allow you to come. I know there is danger. I can't tell exactly where, but it exists. I am sure of that."

"Well, there is danger here, so far as that's con-

cerned," Mervyn pointed out. "My sitting room and bedroom at the Paris are open to Torrita's men, they brush shoulders with me in the streets, they gamble by my side at the *Salles Privées*. I am convinced that if I were found absolutely alone there would be trouble. Look at the man in the passage of the Sporting Club. Murderous devil!"

She glanced around.

"Torrita said yesterday that you had broken his jaw," she confided.

"I wish it had been Torrita's! I suppose I'm in a sort of sanctuary with you, Rosetta, or else there are two of them hanging about now."

She smiled and led him away from the balustrade.

"We'll walk where there are more lights," she suggested. "No, not through the Gardens, you reckless person."

The darkness had fallen rapidly. They lingered for a little longer and then climbed the steps to the Casino Square. Her car was waiting opposite the Paris.

"Let me drive you home," he begged.

She shook her head sadly.

"Dear, you must not, please," she insisted. "We should be all right getting there, of course, and I could send you back, but for anything I know, the chauffeur is Torrita's man. He might take you anywhere, pull up at any one's signal—oh, no, you mustn't think of it, please! I am only praying that to-night will be all right."

He handed her into the car and leaned through the window.

"If you have an opportunity—just for five minutes—you will, won't you?" he pleaded.

Her hand caressed his and her eyes were full of promise.

"Do you not think that I shall want to, if I can?" she whispered.

CHAPTER XX

In detail there were many things about that dinner which Mervyn could never recall, but the impression always remained with him that it was the one epicurean banquet of his life. The servants in their rich but sombre livery moved about like shadows in the great dining room, where all the light seemed thrown downward upon the round table with its exquisitely embroidered Florentine tablecloth. It was indeed the banqueting hall of a palace, with its white walls, its pillars, its beautifully carved ceiling. The service seemed to have been brought to perfection. The food seemed to come from nowhere, and the golden dishes to pass back into oblivion. There were tall glasses by his side, silently filled with wonderful wine; caviare and plovers' eggs, both brought by aeroplane; asparagus from the Iles d'Hyères; lamb as white as veal and as tender as chicken. Upon the centre of the table was one great bowl of scarlet magnolias—an amazing flame of colour in the softly falling, shaded light. The Princess, upon whose right he sat, had never looked more beautiful. Her hair, which seemed more than ever to reflect the deeper shades of wine colour, was drooped a little lower than usual, softening altogether that slight impression of severity for which the perfection of her features was responsible. Her unbecarmined lips

were brilliantly red, her mouth a little more tremulous, her eyes a deeper shade of violet. She talked easily and naturally, with an almost volatile gaiety, but she gave Mervyn the impression of being full to the brim of intense life, as though something had happened, or were happening, which had brought to its fullest and most poignant expression the soul of her marvellous beauty. She sat rather far back in a high-backed chair, upholstered with damask, and rich with old Italian carving. Three great ropes of pearls hung from her delicately slim neck. She was a study for the greatest of the Old Masters. Opposite, Rosetta, with her fairer complexion, brown hair and eyes, and Madonna-like expression, seemed in her unusual type of beauty a perfect foil to her cousin. For the first time Mervyn saw here in white—a gown fashioned, as she told him afterwards, in Florence, simple, but with an exquisite lace shawl falling from the shoulders. Torrita, with his black eyebrows, dark eyes, large, loose tie and severely cut dinner coat, brought a sombre note into the party, which he did, indeed, little to adorn. He talked but seldom and he ate abstractedly. He seemed to be brooding upon some matter far removed from his present luxurious surroundings. Lucilla talked lightly but eloquently of Italian architecture, tapestry and pictures,—subjects upon which Mervyn was unexpectedly well informed. It was not until the fruit was placed upon the table—great bowls of figs upon which the bloom still rested, large peaches and nec-

tarines, jargonelle pears from Covent Garden—that a single word was said upon vital issues. It was the Princess who led the way.

"Monte Carlo was full of ridiculous rumours today," she said. "These frontier incidents are so absurd. There is too much wine sold in the *estaminets*, and these foolish young soldiers excite themselves. I think perhaps it is we on our side who are mostly to blame. We should choose more seasoned men for such posts."

"Land frontiers have always been a great difficulty," Mervyn observed. "They have led to countless small wars in days gone by. Their absence is perhaps one advantage we possess."

"A doubtful one," Rosetta interposed, with a little grimace. "Your fogs are enough to keep any one away. I arrived in London once in November, and I came up the Thames! You may keep your enemies at a distance with such a barrier, but I think sometimes your friends too."

"Next time you visit England," Mervyn said, looking across at her with a faint smile at the corners of his lips, "it must be in June—in a yacht if possible; there is one in the harbour here which might do—and I promise you that you will think our southern boundary wonderful."

"You ought not to have a boundary at all," Torrita declared. "Science has destroyed the isolation of islands. You should have recognised what was coming and built the Channel tunnel sixty years

ago. Then, in all probability, there would have been no war."

Lucilla rose to her feet.

"Smoke when you choose," she enjoined. "Remember that this is an Italian household. When you are ready for coffee, Mr. Amory, and to gossip with us, Torrita will be your guide."

The servants held aside the heavy damask curtains, and the two women passed out of sight, Rosetta with a little backward wave of the hand. Torrita resumed his seat and watched the refilling of his glass.

"Mr. Amory," he asked, "I believe that you told me that you were thirty-three years of age."

Mervyn looked at him in some surprise.

"That is true," he assented.

"I," Torrita said, "am fifty-seven. I have been engaged on the service of my country—in one particular branch of it—for thirty-one years and six months. My work has not been confined to Italy alone. I have travelled in Germany and Russia, Turkey, France, Spain, your own country, China and Japan, and the north coast of Africa. I have gathered experience. One gathers experience by mixing with different races."

"Yours must have been a wonderful life," Mervyn remarked. "I envy you some of your wanderings. My own little efforts have always been too close to civilisation."

"Efforts on whose behalf?"

"My Government's."

"What branch of it?"

"The Foreign Office—N 27 X Department—you know all about it."

Torrita grunted.

"Yes, I know all about it," he admitted. "Your correct *dossier* arrived the day before yesterday. It wasn't too easy to get, though. You are very candid to-night, Mr. Amory."

Mervyn shrugged his shoulders.

"I could scarcely hope to keep my profession secret from you. Naturally I don't blazon it about. Our English Secret Service to-day is on an exceedingly small scale, but, such as it is, I hold a humble position in it."

Torrita lit a cigarette and leaned across the table. He raised his forefinger, like a tutor trying to impress a backward child.

"Young man," he admonished, "you have gifts—without a doubt, you have gifts. Do not be led away by them. There comes a time when the wise man knows how to yield. I say no more. Your business is not mine. I am a spectator from now on. But whilst we smoke this cigarette together, whilst we drink our final glass of this wonderful wine, I give you good words—good and wise words. I say reflect. Put away obstinacy. There is a surprise before you. Meet it in the right spirit."

Mervyn sipped his wine.

"If that surprise," he said resignedly, "should in-

volve one of those unpleasant catastrophes to which men of our profession have to accustom themselves, I shall at least be able to reflect upon the fact that I have eaten the most wonderful dinner and drunk the most marvellous wines of my life."

Torrita smiled—a queer smile, not altogether unpleasant, yet sardonic in its quality.

"It is an ancient Italian custom," he reminded his companion, "to give of the best to those in peril. The Medicis established it. It may have dated from even further back. Our hostess, by-the-by, is a descendant of the Medicis. Shall we obey her bidding and follow her?"

"By all means," Mervyn concurred, rising to his feet. "It was the Princess' wish, I think, that we should not delay."

Servants appeared from somewhere mysteriously, and more curtains were drawn back as they passed through the magnificent suite of reception rooms. Once Torrita paused to point out some marvellous statuary, and again some tapestry with which one of the smaller chambers was hung. Finally they arrived at a closed door. The servants seemed to fade away. It was Torrita who turned the handle and ushered his companion into a small, octagonal-shaped apartment, with high windows leading out on to the terrace. The walls were of dark green, hung with tapestry depicting various hunting scenes, the furniture massive, and old Provençal. Lucilla was seated upon a divan, side by side with a tall, spare

man whose eyes shot out towards Mervyn a look of quick enquiry. Rosetta was seated in a low chair in a distant corner.

"Mr. Amory," the Princess said, "you must let me present you to Signor Matorni. He is paying us a surprise visit."

The two men shook hands. Mervyn murmured some commonplace; Matorni said nothing, but his eyes never left the young man's face.

"Confess that this is a great surprise to you!" Lucilla exclaimed, as she motioned Mervyn to a chair.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I am not sure that it is," Mervyn replied. "I saw the lights of a cruiser lying out in the bay when I was walking on the Terrace this evening, and it occurred to me that she was very much the same size as the one we had in the harbour a few days ago. My uncle came to visit you then, I believe, sir."

Matorni nodded.

"Your uncle is a very obstinate man," he said.

"A family trait," Mervyn murmured.

"I should rid myself of it, if I were you, at your age," Matorni said a little harshly. "I am told that you are connected with the British Secret Service."

"Very distantly," Mervyn acknowledged. "I work for them when there is anything for me to do, and I eke out my time playing tennis."

"Wonderful camouflage where you are not known, I should think."

"Something of the sort is necessary for even a moderate amount of success."

"It is my custom, when I seek information, to ask plain questions," Matorni confided. "If you were an Italian you would be compelled to answer them; as you are an Englishman you will answer them or not, as you choose. All the same, we would be better friends than enemies."

"I agree."

"Did you pay this visit to the Riviera for the sake of your tennis, or in pursuit of your profession?"

"Chiefly for the sake of my tennis," Mervyn affirmed. "I had a sort of general commission to see if there was anything brewing down here. These frontier incidents, you know, have been going on for a long time, and it seemed to our military authorities that you were keeping a great many more men under arms than was absolutely necessary. Just as much as that, no more."

"I see. Then you came into this Uguello business mostly by accident."

"Entirely by accident. I did not know Uguello from Adam. I was placed at his table in the restaurant car by the merest chance."

"He returned with you to your compartment, I understand, where you spent several minutes with the door closed. What happened during those few minutes?"

"You will pardon me, Signor," Mervyn answered quietly, "but that is entirely my affair."

"You do not wish to confide in me?"

"I do not feel myself at liberty to do so."

Matorni scowled.

"That brings us to something of an impasse already, does it not?" he demanded.

Mervyn shrugged his shoulders.

"An impasse, I fear, that was bound to come."

Matorni reflected for a moment.

"Very well," he decided, "you can keep silent. I will reconstruct the history of those few minutes. Uguello, however much he may have been hoping against hope, knew, from the moment he entered the restaurant car, that he was a doomed man. He saw my agents there; he probably recognised Torrita. He had been on an errand for his foul, anarchistic community, in which he had been unexpectedly successful. He had discovered certain plans of mine, and he had been able to suborn one of my agents. He carried with him the evidence of his discoveries in the shape of certain signed documents, the publication of which would have been utterly disastrous. Those papers he had with him when he pushed his way into your compartment. He was a desperate man at that moment. He probably realised what his end would be, but for the sake of the cause he served, he was still desperately anxious to get those papers through to his party in Italy. He saw you —a smiling—forgive me—not too intelligent looking Englishman, a sportsman and a person altogether unlikely to be suspected. Who could serve

his purpose better? I suggest that in those few moments he passed on his papers to you with instructions as to their disposal."

"It all sounds very plausible," Mervyn agreed.

"It is very nearly the truth," the other rejoined. "The unfortunate part of the affair was that, instead of being an amiable, ingenuous young person, as you probably appeared to him, you happen to be a young man of brains, and, from what I can gather, a rather amazing amount of resource. My people succeeded with Uguello as a matter of course. Torrita was upon the scene, and he had absolutely no chance. To their surprise, however, they found no papers of any sort upon him or amongst his belongings. They turned to you, the only man with whom he spoke. Your carriage was entered through the window, and your things were submitted to an expert search. You, too, were without papers of any sort. Yet you had those papers from Uguello. What did you do with them?"

Mervyn considered the matter for a moment.

"There is no reason why I should not gratify your curiosity upon such a trifling matter," he conceded. "It was perfectly obvious that, as I had been seen alone with Uguello, I should be suspected, and my things searched. I just strolled along to the luggage department, which was at the end of *voiture* Number Three, opened one of my trunks, and concealed the documents there in a place of security. Then I locked up my trunk again, took my place in my compart-

ment, undressed, and slept until Signorina, the Comtessa, woke me up."

Matorni turned to Torrita.

"The young man showed ingenuity," he observed. "That is more than I can say for your searchers."

Torrita shrugged his shoulders. He said nothing.

"Very well then," Matorni continued. "You arrive in Monte Carlo with documents in your possession vitally affecting the future and interests of my country. Your movements appear to be fairly simple. You throw yourself with zest into your tennis. Your visits are confined to your sporting friends, to the Casino, the Club, your tradespeople and your bank. Your days are, to all appearance, spent in the most harmless fashion, and meanwhile, across Europe, there sweeps a ripple of mistrust. There are whisperings in Paris, in London and Berlin. Something is wrong. No one knows exactly what. The French War Council meet, the Disarmament Committee pays a surprise visit to Germany, in Downing Street an unexpected Cabinet Council is summoned."

"I can perhaps save your time here," Mervyn announced quietly. "I can set at rest any lingering doubts you may have upon the matter. To me, I suppose, as a man of honour, that packet, confided to my charge by a man about to die, should have been sacred. I, in common with other members of my profession, subscribe to a different code of ethics. I accordingly did what a man of my calling is forced

to do, although, in the early stages, it goes a little against the grain. By means which Signor Torrita no doubt knows all about—he probably has a department dealing with the matter even more thoroughly than we do—I opened the packet, copied the documents, and despatched that copy to the Foreign Office of my Government."

There was a little murmur from Lucilla; a half-stifled cry from Rosetta. Matorni remained the coolest person in the room.

"That the information had leaked out was obvious," he said, "also some foreknowledge of my plans. Torrita never would believe that you were the mischievous medium. Now he knows. It is well that he knows."

Torrita seemed to have relapsed into immobility. His face was like set marble. Only once his lips twitched as though in pain.

"Now," Matorni continued, "we can understand why Général de Parnouste is here with his staff officers, why the new guns are being mounted on the Corniche Road, why rolling stock is being sent to Marseilles from all over France. We can understand why the German aeroplane factories are being overhauled, why their arsenals are being visited, and why an emissary from Downing Street is even now in Berlin. You, a mere pawn in the game, Amory, have done your best to thwart and check my plans, yet you have not wholly succeeded."

"I have done my duty to my country," Amory in-

sisted. "You yourself, in my position, would have done no more, nor any less."

"You have made my task, the task of the Italian army, far more difficult," Matorni proceeded, "but the worst blow has not fallen. I am going to imitate your candour to some extent, young man. I prefer that you should have communicated, as you have done, my plans to Downing Street, than that you should have come into touch with the Red Shirts. I do not fear England or France; I fear only the rabble of my own country, and the dissensions amongst my forces which would arise, if they knew beforehand the things which are to come."

"I see," Mervyn assented. "You want the vital incident, whatever it may be, which is to provoke war, to blaze all over Italy without the people knowing that your plans were made beforehand, and that the incident itself is faked."

"For an Englishman," Matorni pronounced steadfastly, "you have perhaps the clearest head and the clearest form of expression I have ever encountered in a member of your profession. Your candour opens up to me new possibilities in diplomacy. I shall pursue them even further. I will imitate your admirable frankness and pray that you may be disposed to continue it. I ask you, Amory, have you as yet succeeded in coming into touch with the Red Shirts?"

"Let us put it the other way," Mervyn begged. "The move does not rest with me. The Red Shirts have not succeeded in sending me an emissary

to whom I felt justified in handing over the packet."

Again there was a curious little murmur from the Princess, echoed by a sigh from Matorni. Expression at last began to creep into Torrita's face. His eyes flashed.

"You have held no communication, then, with the Red Shirts?" Torrita demanded sharply.

"They have failed to establish what you would call connection with me," Mervyn acknowledged. "There was a little *danseuse* calling herself Caterina—"

Torrita was more like himself again.

"Pooh!" he exclaimed. "The real Caterina left Milan shadowed by my people. At the frontier we substituted a Caterina of our own."

"Not one of your happiest efforts, that, was it, Torrita?" Matorni sneered.

"She had done good work for us before," Torrita argued, frowning. "She obtained her interview with Amory. She visited him in his apartments. What was the result?"

"Four sheets of blank notepaper, I think it was," Mervyn observed thoughtfully; "it may have been five."

"And a dagger through her heart from the Red Shirts for playing them false," Matorni added. "Why did you not hand her the packet, Amory? Where did she fail?"

"In the formula. It was all right, up to a certain point. Then she gave the wrong word."

Matorni flashed a glance of condemnation at Torrita.

"Your information," he said coldly, "was at fault."

"Three parts of it were wonderfully correct," Mervyn put in. "There was only one slight fault."

"Without that you would have given her the packet?" Matorni demanded.

"Without a doubt," Mervyn assented. "I should have been freed of all further responsibility."

Matorni shivered in his chair.

"Do you hear that, Torrita?" he snarled. "If your men had done their work properly, if the whole Red Shirt formula had been in your possession, the guns would have been thundering in the hills at this moment."

"What they learned cost five of my best men their lives," Torrita muttered.

"Where is the genuine Caterina?" Mervyn enquired.

"In a fortress," Torrita answered brusquely.

"How humane!" Mervyn permitted himself to murmur. "If I may venture to say so, Torrita, you would render your service more popular, if you extended some slight measure of protection to your helpers. That poor girl did her best for you with the information she had. You surely might have stopped her from taking shelter in a den of infamy like the Hôtel des Trois Étoiles."

"The authorities at the Provençal Bar insisted upon it," Torrita ventured coldly. "They would not

receive her otherwise. The risk had to be taken."

Matorni rose suddenly to his feet. He seemed unusually tall as he loomed between the two men.

"Come," he said, "let us finish with details. By surmise, by suggestion, by some very admirable plain speaking, we have brought this matter up to date. The Red Shirts have not received the packet. Where is it, Amory?"

Mervyn smiled.

"Isn't that question just a trifle ingenuous?" he suggested. "In any case, you will understand that there can be no reply."

Matorni towered over him.

"You know who I am," he thundered. "Will you, for the good of Italy, give it to me?"

"I will not," was the firm reply.

CHAPTER XXI

Only Rosetta moved during the next few moments. She rose silently from her place and seated herself by Mervyn's side. Lucilla moved uneasily in her chair. Torrita looked towards his chief. Matorni was inexplicably calm. He had the air of a man more puzzled than indignant.

"You have done your duty to your Government," he said. "I am wondering under what other real obligation you feel yourself? Wherein does your great interest lie with regard to those papers at the present moment?"

"To tell you the truth," Marvyn admitted, "I am bored to death with the possession of them, but I have a slight predisposition towards keeping my word to a dead man. For that reason, I shall hold the packet until some one comes to me with the proper credentials. I shall then hand it over to that person and be glad to get rid of it."

There was again a brief silence. Lucilla, who was leaning a little forward in her chair, glanced alternately at Mervyn and Torrita. She had the air of being afraid. Matorni's eyes seemed to have grown smaller, instead of larger, the muscles of his face were screwed up, his top teeth were showing, yet his voice was curiously level.

"You mean that you will hand it over to the Red Shirts?" he demanded.

"To the first person who gives me the correct

formula," was the cool reply. "Wherever he comes from or whoever he may be will not be my affair."

"You dare to say that to my face?"

"Naturally. This is a conference of plain speaking. What are you going to do about it?"

"Tell Torrita to shoot you where you sit," Matorni answered grimly. "No one knows that I have ever been in this house. We can both be in Genoa in a few hours. How about your precious papers then?"

"Well, in that case, since you ask me," Mervyn confided, "the documents in question would be published simultaneously in half a dozen French journals which have some international circulation, and in the English *Daily Mail*, which is also on sale in Italy. Furthermore, the documents will, by other means, which the ingenuity of my successor will devise, reach their destination a little less directly but possibly as effectually."

"And how do you propose to effect all this?" Matorni enquired.

"Just as any of Torrita's men would have done who were placing themselves in my position," Mervyn explained. "Reflect. I have come, have I not, to receive entertainment in the lions' den? I am not really afraid of consequences, because I think that the laws of hospitality are usually respected, even amongst the desperate, but there is always a chance which one has to prepare for. The Consul at Monte Carlo is my friend, the *Chef de Sûreté*, to whom I brought letters from Scotland Yard, is my confidant.

Both know exactly what to do if I am not in a position to present myself personally to them by eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

Matorni crossed the room to a sideboard upon which stood a carafe of wine. He poured himself out a tumblerful and drank more than half of it. Then he came back to his place.

"I wish you were an Italian, Mr. Amory," he said.

"At the present moment," Mervyn assured him, "I am devoutly thankful that I am not."

For the first time Matorni smiled, although there was nothing of mirth or humour in the twist to his lips.

"Let me ask you this question," he begged. "Have you any ambitions?"

"None except those I can minister to by my own efforts," was the unhesitating reply.

"I can believe that," Matorni acknowledged. "I have bribed princes and prime ministers before now, but—"

"The pawns are always the most difficult," Mervyn put in.

"I will give you a million pounds in English money, a palace on the Adriatic, and a province—if you want land—for those letters," Matorni suggested.

"The one jarring note in this otherwise very pleasant interview," Mervyn sighed. "Need we prolong it?"

Torrita rose and whispered in his chief's ear. The latter shook his head.

"Our guest is the most typically British person I have ever met," he declared. "He is obstinate to the point of stupidity. We waste our time with him. These Red Shirts are, after all, bunglers in their work. We must take our chance that the papers remain in their present hiding place until the guns are talking."

Lucilla motioned to her cousin.

"Rosetta," she asked, "will you show our guest to the front of the house? We do not wish servants in this room," she explained. "You have a car, Mr. Amory?"

"Just my two-seater. I left it in the avenue."

It was a difficult exit. Lucilla was like an icicle, save for the anger in her eyes; Matorni, to whose arm she was clinging, was white with rage; Torrita was speechless, gesticulating furiously to himself.

"Princess," Mervyn said, "I offer you my thanks for your wonderful dinner. Signor Matorni, it is a great regret to me to be so disobliging. The circumstances, and the ethics, of life, however, forbid my doing as you ask."

He moved towards the door. As he reached the threshold, Torrita came out of his corner. He struck his outstretched palm with the fist of his other hand.

"I would give many years of my life," he declared, "to know where you have those papers—you who seemed so simple, to have cunning which my men cannot match! It is incredible! You speak of the *Chef de Sûreté*—we know of your friendship

there, but it is not to him you have entrusted the documents. His safe has been opened and his *bureau* searched inch by inch. So it has been with your rooms. There is not a crevice or a corner in which the search has not been made. So with the room of your friend the Minister. Have you got the papers after all, Signor Amory? That is what I would ask."

"I have them, all right," Mervyn admitted pleasantly. "Some day, if you are really curious, Signor, I will tell you. You will probably be surprised, because they are—just where they should be."

Rosetta led him down a long passage and through a swing door which opened into the great hall. His fingers felt her arm. She was trembling.

"You, too, are angry with me?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I cannot speak," she whispered.

At the sound of the opening of the door, servants trooped in, and lights flared from the roof and along the walls. She paused and held out her hand. The fingers which he kissed were as cold as ice.

"May I not stay with you a little time—somewhere?" he begged.

"Please go," she insisted feverishly. "Hurry! Race your car until you reach the road."

"Until to-morrow, then?"

"It will be until to-morrow. I will see you then."

CHAPTER XXII

With the departure of Mervyn the atmosphere of tension in the little room was visibly lessened. Torrita listened to his retreating footsteps, a scowl upon his face. Matorni seemed suddenly to return from his passion to a lighter mood. He drew Lucilla affectionately towards him.

"These are the things which happen to all of us who set out in the world as conquerors," he said, smiling. "We have to learn our lessons like the others. We move the mountains and stumble over the molehills. You are sure that this youth is closely watched, Torrita?"

"By day and by night," was the grim reply. "Caterina's has been the only attempt to approach him. For the rest, he lives between the tennis courts, the baths, the Royalty Bar, Quinto's Restaurant, the Café de Paris, and the hotel. Believe me, it will be difficult for any messenger from the Red Shirts, however well disguised, to hold communication with him. Supposing he succeeded, that messenger would never leave Monte Carlo alive. My men can use their knives as well as the Red Shirts of the Trois Étoiles. They will not forget little Caterina."

"We must take our chances then," Matorni declared. "Make your arrangements, Torrita. I leave in a quarter of an hour."

Torrita left the room hurriedly. Lucilla crept a little closer into her lover's arms.

"The young man is obstinate," Matorni reflected, "but he is tied hand and foot. He cannot of his own accord approach any of that red-shirted scum, because he knows none of them. If they approach him, Torrita will see to it. It may be well, for we should get the papers. The frontier is already warned. Let us forget the youth. I hate to dwell upon my failures. Find me a calendar, Lucilla."

She fetched one from an ormolu table—a little affair of tortoiseshell and gold. His blunt forefinger, with its shortly trimmed nail, passed down the dates.

"To-day is the fourth of April," he said. "Upon the fourteenth, you must leave. An escort shall meet you at the frontier. After the fourteenth, there might be trouble."

"But this is sooner than you thought!" she exclaimed.

"What else can I do? The young man forces my hand. I had arranged for very serious trouble on the first of May. It must arrive instead a fortnight earlier. Our Consulate will be burned, our flag insulted. With that will come the rising. All the troops who believe that they are being massed for manoeuvres will be swept across the hills and into France. We shall say that we are weary of apologies which mean nothing. We shall hold the railway and make a demand upon the French Government which they cannot possibly accept. All the time we shall be moving troops. The railway between Toulon and La Pauline will be blown into chaos by agents who have

been on the spot for months. After that, the French Divisions will only be able to come in by driblets. Nice will be in our hands before they can put up a show of resistance, and from Nice we need go no further."

"It is all very wonderful," she murmured, "but for three weeks I must lose you."

"For three wonderful weeks," he answered. "Lucilla!"

Torrita made a noiseless entrance, with his chief's cloak and hat. He threw open the French windows. Upon the terrace, and down the steps which descended to the sea front, at every twenty yards the dark figures of the Marines on guard were stationed. The night was moonless and cloudy. The Princess shivered nervously.

"I wish that this villa overhung the sea," she confessed. "The garden is full of hiding places."

Matorni smiled.

"I preserve my faith in Torrita," he said.

"You may well do that," the latter declared confidently. "I have failed with that damnable Englishman, perhaps, but you yourself have fared no better. And for your safety, I pledge myself. There is not a servant in the house who is not my man. This is your fourth visit, and not a whisper has ever been heard, even in our own country, that you have left its soil. Under my protection you are safe, my Chief."

"Remember to watch the Englishman, night and day," Matorni enjoined sternly. "If the Red Shirts contrive to get a messenger through to him, I'll make a traffic policeman of you, Torrita, in the Piazza della Campagna. You shall stand there, with a whistle in your mouth, and a white wand in your hand. Adieu, my friends!"

He stepped out on to the terrace and was halfway down the broad steps, moving with the light, swinging gait of a boy, when, without any sort of warning, a slight figure crept out from a grating underneath, sprang to his feet, and threw himself upon Matorni. There was the flash of steel in the dim, grey light, a downward stab, which would have found its way home, beyond a doubt, but that Torrita, who had followed close behind his chief, struck the uplifted arm a sweeping blow. It was all over in a minute. The dagger went clattering down the terrace steps, and the man was held in a grip of iron by Torrita and the two nearest sentries who had sprung forward. All the time Lucilla stood upon the topmost step without uttering a sound. She came slowly down.

"Antonio!" she sobbed.

"I am unhurt," he announced coolly. "Where does this scoundrel come from?"

"He must have crawled out of the cellars underneath," Torrita confessed. "Twice a day though they are searched. I do not understand. It is incredible."

The would-be assassin looked up. He was an under-

sized little creature, with three days' growth of black beard disfiguring his face. There was a scar upon his forehead and another upon his chin.

"I have lain two days in an empty hogshead of wine," he told them—"two days without food or drink. I would stay there till I had starved for this chance."

"You do not appear to have benefited by it," his intended victim remarked.

"I have failed," was the fierce rejoinder, "but after me will come others, and so it will be until one of us succeeds."

"Hold him less tightly," Matorni directed. "You are strangling him. Now tell me why you want my life?"

"For the same reason that a hundred thousand others do. Because you are a tyrant and a murderer. You started to work in the interests of the people. You think of nothing now but of climbing on their bodies to the pinnacle of dictatorship."

"A person of education, I perceive. What are you by profession?"

"I was a schoolmaster until your politics drove me almost crazy."

"What I do, I do for the good of Italy," Matorni declared firmly.

"You lie," was the swift retort. "You do it for your own personal glory. You have lost all love for the people. You are an adventurer, drunk with ambition, bolstered up by the bourgeoisie and the aris-

tocracy, and the enemy of all of us others. Die you will, for if one fails another will succeed."

Matorni's hand stole into his pocket. He waved on one side the two Marines who were holding the prisoner. Then he took out his revolver.

"You are about to receive justice," he said. "You are going to be treated as all assassins should be treated."

"Amen," the other responded, without flinching.

No sound was uttered. Even Lucilla stood motionless. There was a little spit of fire and a sharp report. For a moment the man seemed as though about to fall backwards. Then, instead, his legs collapsed from underneath him, and he swung sideways. He lay there, crumpled up, half on one step, and half on another, his mouth a little open. The only expression upon his face in those few moments seemed one of surprise. Matorni scowled down at him and then called to Torrita.

"Have the body thrown into the sea presently," he ordered. "Come!"

He passed through the line of guarding men in silence, turning at the corner to wave his hand to Lucilla. Then he ran lightly down the steps, and a moment later the motor boat, the engine of which had already begun to throb, was standing out into the bay. From his seat in the bows he looked gloomily back upon the brilliantly lit coast. A blaze of illumination flared out from the Casino, a veritable palace of fire. On the hillside beyond, the lights

stretched away until they became mere pin pricks in the darkness. Immediately behind, in the gardens of the villa which he had just left, there was little to be seen. A jagged mass of clouds a moment or two later, however, passed from in front of a dim, watery moon, and on the terrace steps there was a faint view of Lucilla, a slim, sad figure, leaning towards the sea. Below, through the grove, on to the top of the steps, and out on to the stone pier around which the waves were breaking, came a small company of men carrying a burden, which they presently lowered into a rowing boat. Two of them took oars, and they pushed off eastwards. Then another mass of clouds rolled in front of the moon, and there was nothing more to be seen. Through the darkness came the sound of a heavy splash.

CHAPTER XXIII

Never since Monte Carlo had become recognised as the playground for the frivolous of the world had it passed through such a period of excitement, of strain, of nerves and sensational rumours as during the next few days. The exodus still continued, although the crowds in the Rooms, at the Club, and at the various restaurants and bars seemed undiminished. The great chars-à-bancs, packed in every seat and laden with luggage, passed out hourly on their way to Paris. The acquisition of a seat in the Blue Train became almost a miniature auction, at which the *concierge* was the auctioneer, and the nervous crowd who leaned over his counter the bidders. The Blue Train was the only one running with any regard to time. The whole of the rest of the passenger traffic had become chaotic, and especially between Nice and Toulon trains were often held up for hours at a time to permit of the eastward-coming stream of stores, and the various munitions of war. At night there was the constant rumble of heavy trains not upon the schedule. The public was excluded from the stations, but the air was full of rumours as to the number of soldiers continually passing through Nice to occupy the hills beyond. The one sane feature about the whole thing was the admirable restraint indulged in by the French press.

Mervyn and Lord Bremner, after a strenuous morning at tennis, sat under one of the striped um-

brellas in the gardens of the Royalty Bar and listened with amusement to the various wild stories being recounted on every side of them. It was reported that Matorni had resigned, that he had shot himself, that he was in a lunatic asylum, that he had demanded the King's signature to a proclamation calling every grade and class of soldiers to the Colours, that the roads from Genoa to Vintimille were closed except for military purposes, that the Italian fleet, in full battle formation, had been seen passing in the grey light of the morning *en route* for Toulon. Bremner sat and listened to it all with a chuckle.

"My lad," he said to Mervyn, "you're not likely to get the wind up yourself, I know; don't let your pals worry, either."

"You know something?"

The older man assented.

"If there is one person in this place who has the right to know as much as I do, it is you," he admitted, "but you'll have to be patient for another day or two. All I can tell you is that I am hopeful."

A dust-covered car, of military grey, pulled up outside the bar. Général de Parnouste stepped out, and, followed by an aide-de-camp, entered the enclosure. He recognised Bremner and came at once to his table.

"Glad to see you have a minute or two to spare for relaxation, General," Bremner remarked, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Come and join us."

"With great pleasure."

The General presented his aide-de-camp, orders were given, and the four men sat down at the round table.

"I pay brief visits to these places," the General confided, "because I wish, above all things, not to render myself a figure of alarm here. I cannot conceal the fact that I spend my days in professional activity."

"They tell me that your car is seen upon the hills at five o'clock in the morning," Bremner observed. "Midnight revellers speak of its lights flashing along the sky line. No wonder you are ready for a little refreshment!"

The General stroked his grey moustache.

"I work best in the silent hours," he said. "The work itself is no doubt unnecessary, but in the face of such a situation, one must be prepared. It is well, however, at all costs, to avoid panic. We do not wish the Riviera emptied of its visitors. We do not wish our own people to suffer unduly. If we are doomed to fight, fight we must, but so far as we are concerned, it will be our last resource."

"It is my firm conviction," Bremner pronounced, "that it will never become necessary."

The General looked at him keenly from underneath his bushy eyebrows.

"You have news from home?" he demanded.

"Reassuring news," was the quiet reply. "A suggestion making largely for peace, of which your representatives in England have doubtless been al-

ready apprised, is being discussed. Beyond that, I have a little private information, however, and I have faith."

"You give me encouragement," the General declared. "No Frenchman has ever yet shrunk from facing an inevitable war, but although war is my business in life, I tell you frankly that I hate it. The technical side of it may seem alluring, but afterwards, whoever may gain the victory, think of what remains behind. If we fight Italy, two great nations, both Latin, who should be living together in friendship and amity, for a hundred years will be filled with hatred one for the other. Hate is an evil quality. It poisons all the spring of good feeling. Take this little spot, for instance, the happy meeting place of the world. The Latin atmosphere here is too predominant for it to exist alone, or as an Anglo-Saxon metropolis. Think of the constant bitterness, whichever side might win, when Frenchman and Italian meet."

"There must be no war," Bremner insisted firmly. "More powerful people than you and I are determined upon that. If I dared, I would go so far, even at this moment, as to say there *shall* be no war."

"Some one must teach this hot-headed lunatic a lesson," the aide-de-camp muttered.

"It will not be done by abusing him," Bremner rejoined sharply. "Matorni has been a great man for Italy—up till now he has been a great man for the

world. He is a person of such immense vision that even now he may realise that he is on the threshold of a colossal mistake. It will not help things to belittle him. We must play our game with our brains and not with our tongues."

The young officer bowed. He took his rebuke politely, but it was obvious that he was unmoved.

"Matorni is easily the greatest statesman of his decade, even of his century," Bremner concluded. "It is up to us all to pray that he may be spared from making a hideous mistake. I myself have faith in him. I believe that he will see the truth."

Francis, the suave proprietor of the bar, came diffidently forward. He bowed on the outskirts of the table and eyed Mervyn.

"I beg the pardon of every one," he said. "Could you spare me one moment, Monsieur Amory? There is some one who wishes to speak to you."

Mervyn rose to his feet and glanced apologetically at his companions. Bremner nodded pleasantly.

"At his age," he murmured, "I was sometimes disturbed myself."

Francis led his client to the indoor bar and into a further room, a recent addition, which was almost deserted.

"Monsieur Amory," he said, "I must ask your pardon for my presumption in interfering. It is Ferrari, the proprietor of the Provençal. He has found his way here, in the hope of a word with you.

He is my wife's cousin, and it was difficult to avoid granting a favour."

"Quite all right, Francis," Mervyn assured him. "Where is he?"

Francis opened a door at the further end of the room and ushered his companion into a small parlour, where Ferrari was waiting nervously, twirling his little black moustache and walking back and forth. Francis carefully closed the door and disappeared into the bar.

"Well, what is it, Ferrari?" Mervyn enquired. "Have the police been troublesome again about Caterina?"

"With Caterina, Signor, it is finished—most unfortunately finished," the man replied. "Who was to know that she was an impostor save that the Signor himself had the wit to discover it? Still, she paid. One would not wish to speak evil of the dead. The Signor must know that this time I have received a message which cannot err."

"The devil you have!" Mervyn exclaimed. "For me?"

"For the Signor. I implore him to have trust."

"What am I to do?"

"If the Signor will visit my bar precisely at midnight to-night, the same table will be reserved for him. A companion will arrive."

Mervyn reflected for a moment.

"I wonder how much you know of this matter, Ferrari?" he asked, looking at him keenly.

"What there is to be known, Signor," was the prompt response. "I know that the Signor has papers of vast moment which must come to the chiefs of the party to which I used to belong. Behold a messenger arrives!"

"You know Torrita?"

Ferrari indulged in a significant grimace.

"A pestilential fellow," he declared. "It was he who caused to be arrested the real Caterina and had her thrust into a fortress. It was he who sent us the impostor—poor child!"

"It is only fair to tell you this, Ferrari," Mervyn said gravely. "Torrita has sworn that no messenger from the Red Shirts shall leave Monte Carlo alive with those papers. You know as well as I do that this place is swarming with his spies. I myself am scarcely ever out of their sight."

"The person who comes will succeed, Signor," Ferrari prophesied.

"Very well," Mervyn acquiesced, "I shall be there, but remember, I shall require the formula in absolute exactness. If I do not receive it, I shall leave the place. I shall know that you have been once more deceived by Torrita's creatures. If the formula is correctly given, I shall do my part; if it is incorrect in the slightest detail, I shall expect you to do yours."

Ferrari beamed with gratitude.

"It is all that is asked of the Signor," he assured him.

CHAPTER XXIV

Mervyn made his way back to the gardens of the bar to find that Général de Parnouste and his aide-de-camp had departed, and that their places had been taken by Lucilla and Rosetta. The former held out her hand with her usual gracious affability. Rosetta greeted him with an understanding smile. There was nothing in the manner of either reminiscent of their last dramatic meeting.

"Lord Bremner has been so kind as to take pity upon two lonely women and to offer us an *apéritif*," Lucilla said. "When we come to talk, however, he is not so gallant. Every one here is quoting him as being so well informed, yet to us he will say nothing."

"Lord Bremner is quite right," Rosetta agreed coolly. "You forget that we are Italians, Lucilla. It is not for us to know on what grounds he feels his optimism."

Bremner smiled deprecatingly.

"At home," he remarked, "I am a politician by profession; here, I come for the sunshine, for the tennis, a rest from troubles and anxieties of every description. I am on leave, and when I am on leave, I cut off all communication with Downing Street."

"Yet you have been home," the Princess observed, toying with her cigarette case, "and returned again. You flew, too, the papers say. You were in a hurry. Was it not so, Lord Bremner?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I fly," he observed, "because I hate to waste time in travelling. Besides, just now the French railways south of Paris are somewhat congested. My journey home, however, had no significance. All that I had to do in London was completed in little more than an hour."

Lucilla inclined her head.

"In any case," she suggested, "we grow too serious. Hear the buzz of talk all round us. Everybody asks, 'Will there be war?' Yet who really believes that such a thing is possible? It is to gratify our melodramatic instincts that we even contemplate such an absurdity."

"Quite right," Bremner approved. "It's a perfectly infernal instinct, this instinct for the sensational. I remember a great psychologist writing an article about it not long ago in the *Fortnightly*. His argument was that, however kindly our disposition, our first impulse on opening a newspaper or hearing by word of mouth of an incredible disaster was one of pleasure. It might only last for a second. It would probably be succeeded by all the proper feelings, but the first electric thrill was, without a doubt, of joy."

"Our brains are quaintly fashioned," Lucilla murmured.

It was getting towards luncheon time, and the people were leaving. The Princess looked across at her waiting automobile and yawned slightly.

"One must go, I suppose," she sighed.

"Unless you will both give me the pleasure of lunching with us?" Bremner suggested. "This young man and I were all alone. He was trying to persuade me to trust myself to his tender mercies and undertake that awful drive up to Mont Agel."

"It is an enterprise," Lucilla reflected a little doubtfully. "Did I not hear something, though, about the Military Road being closed?"

"They won't stop us going to the golf links," Mervyn assured her. "Let me take you, Comtessa, in my little two-seater."

"Then I shall have Lord Bremner all to myself," Lucilla observed, smiling. "We shall see whether alone I cannot get him to be a little more confidential."

"I feel that the secrets of the British nation are in danger," Bremner declared,—"that is to say, so far as I am in possession of any of them. Nevertheless, the recompense justifies the risk."

Lucilla rose to her feet.

"I do not know whether it is a very pleasant thing to be an English Cabinet Minister, Lord Bremner," she said; "otherwise you should certainly have been a diplomat. As an ambassador, I can imagine you meeting with great success. You open your lips to say gracious things when the opportunity serves, and you keep them very tightly closed when necessity demands."

"Which of the two, I wonder," he replied, as he

followed her towards the waiting automobile, "could tell the other the more, if we were out for an exchange of confidences?"

"You mean because Matorni is my friend? But Matorni is not one who makes confidants. He is like all strong men; he has learned the gift of silence. He tells me a great deal, it is true, but it is just what the whole world knows. Only it comes from him."

"Does he ever speak, I wonder," Bremner reflected, as they took their places in the car and moved at once swiftly away, "of Italy's lost possessions?"

"I think that he felt the joy that all true Italians felt," she replied, "when we drove Austria back to where she belonged. For the rest, I believe he is content that Italy should develop internally. She has surely made strides enough for one generation."

"Matorni is a man of vision," he confessed.

Rosetta leaned back amongst the cushions of the Hispano-Suiza with a little sigh of content.

"How clever you are!" she murmured. "Lucilla and I came out praying that we had not to lunch alone at the Château. Last night was terrible."

"I found it rather amusing," he confided.

She indulged in a little grimace.

"Because you were the conqueror in that triangular duel. Of course I was glad—oh, you cannot tell how glad I was!—but that did not make it any better afterwards. Besides, other things happened. It was a terrible night. I want to forget it."

He swung round a corner and on a straight stretch took her hand in his.

"Soon," he promised, "you shall forget all these hectic times—or rather the disagreeable part of them. In a week or two at the most, all this sensation will have died down. Then our time will come."

"Our time!" she repeated.

"It hasn't escaped your memory, has it, that we are engaged to be married?" he ventured.

"I was wondering whether you had forgotten."

"And what put that into your head?"

"Round the last corner, there wasn't a soul in sight."

"Neither is there now," he answered, leaning down.

She took off her hat and threw it into the dickey. Her lips, so exquisitely fresh, met his almost eagerly. The larger car was well ahead of them, had already emerged on to the main road to La Turbie. He slackened speed for a moment and took her closer into his arms, kissed her eyes, so provocatively half closed, and again her lips. She gave a little sigh of content.

"Yes," she murmured, "I feel sure now that we are engaged. Drive slowly, dear Mervyn. This air is so wonderful, and I must recover. All my eyelashes are crushed, I'm a most outrageous colour, and my lips are burning."

"You look adorable," he assured her passionately.

"I do not know. I only know that I feel very happy. My only anxiety in the world is for Lucilla.

Her whole heart and soul are with Matorni."

"Has she any influence over him?"

Rosetta shook her head.

"Neither she nor any one else. Matorni is a man who lives alone in his thoughts, his dreams, and all his ambitions. To take advice from any one would be gall to him."

"It is a pity," Mervyn declared.

"You think," she asked wistfully, "that he is courting disaster?"

He turned and smiled down at her. Very delightful she looked, with her long limbs, and long slim body stretched out, and her head back amongst the cushions. Every little touch of femininity about her seemed to him exquisite and alluring—the perfection of her patent shoes, the smooth silk of her stockings, the lustre of the single row of pearls about her neck, the soft loveliness of her transparent skin.

"Am I answering my sweetheart," he asked; "or Lucilla's cousin and friend?"

"Ah," she sighed, "I sympathise, yet I think I may say you answer your sweetheart, for Lucilla and I do not always think alike. As regards the future of Italy we have very different ideas, but then, you see, I am half American. Imperialism is a creed which makes no appeal to me. I like to see the poor people of a country happy. Matorni once thought of little else, and in those days he was a great man."

"Then I will tell you what I think," he said. "I think that Matorni will prove within the next few

weeks whether he is really a great man, an inspired statesman, or whether he is just one of those who have climbed so high only to find the atmosphere of power intoxicating, only to lose his balance at the top. We shall know before long."

La Turbie presented an unusual appearance. There was a long chain of military camions in the main street, and at the turn to the golf club two sentries who eyed them closely but allowed them to pass without challenge. Farther up, there were gangs of men repairing the road, and at the last turn, where the notice "Route Militaire" appeared, they were challenged and stopped.

"Monsieur goes to the golf?" the sentry asked.

"To the golf," Mervyn acquiesced. "I am English and a member. Mademoiselle is my guest for lunch."

"Be so good upon descending," the man enjoined, "to keep closely to the right-hand side of the road. It is possible that the golf course may be closed, but the restaurant is open."

They drove on, and reached the clubhouse only a few minutes after Lucilla and Bremner. There was little golf being played, and the restaurant was crowded with French officers in uniform. A table, however, was quickly arranged for the four of them near one of the windows. They looked out upon the sunlit valleys and the vista of snow-capped mountains, bathed now in sunshine. A breath of the mountain air came in through the window with a familiar tang, clear and crystalline.

"It is a very beautiful land," Lucilla said thoughtfully.

"From a panoramic point of view," Bremner agreed. "Some of those villages, though, that look so beautiful from here, are bleak, deserted places, if ever you make your way to them, and the wine grown in those sunny hollows—ugh! They do not face eastwards for nothing."

"I begin to suspect that you are a materialist, Lord Bremner."

"If anything would make me so, this omelet would," was the enthusiastic rejoinder.

They lunched gaily, but it seemed to Mervyn a curious thing that the buzz of conversation which had been echoing through the room upon their entrance had almost died away since they had taken their places. Two French officers who had been talking confidentially at the next table—one sketching with a stump of pencil upon the back of the menu—spoke now only of the wines of the country. In the middle of the room a long table was set, at the head of which Général de Parnouste was seated. At the moment of their arrival every one had been talking eagerly; now there was almost complete silence. Towards the end of luncheon, Lucilla looked around her with slightly wrinkled forehead.

"I think that we are not very popular here," she remarked. "Why is that, I wonder? We are very harmless people."

"Soldiers are the same all the world over," Brem-

ner assured her. "Within a mile of a fortification they become mysterious."

"But are there fortifications here?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows? There is a rumour that every green on the golf course is protected by maxim guns."

"From what?" she demanded.

"From the ants," Bremner confided. "And the moles. Our secretary over there will tell you that they form the anxiety of his life."

Lucilla laughed gaily as she rose to her feet.

"We have had a wonderful lunch," she said. "Let us go out and look at these mole and ant-ridden greens."

They strolled out on to the deserted first tee. Up on the hill to their right was the fort, which for years had been occupied by three French soldiers. To-day it seemed to be bristling with activity. Half a dozen artillery wagons were descending the hill at a gallop; an officer on horseback was supervising the operations of a gang of sappers. From a range of hills on the other side of the valley came what seemed to be a small cloudburst. A party of mounted officers with notebooks in their hands was grouped at the edge of the ravine.

"Finding ranges," Mervyn whispered to Rosetta.

An aide-de-camp touched Bremner on the shoulder and led him away to where Général de Parnouste was enthusiastically admiring the view. The latter greeted Bremner cordially, and they exchanged a few

light remarks. Suddenly, however, he wheeled round, and, passing his arm through his companion's, drew him a little on one side.

"You will forgive an apparent liberty, I am sure, Lord Bremner," he apologised. "You and I understand one another, I hope?"

"I trust so indeed," was the grave reply.

"Madame la Princesse is not *persona grata* here," the General said earnestly. "You will forgive my frankness. This pleasant little golf ground of your country people might, under certain circumstances, become a very important strategic position. You are probably leaving in a few minutes?"

Bremner nodded.

"I will see to it," he promised.

"You understand?" the General insisted. "We do not wish to make a military cordon of this region, we do not wish to do anything to increase the state of tension and suspicion which already exists. You may play golf here, if you will, but play with English people, not Italians."

Bremner took his leave quickly, signalled down towards the shed, and the Princess' large car rolled out.

"It becomes chilly," he remarked, as he rejoined Lucilla. "Shall we descend?"

She stepped, smiling, into the automobile.

"And they say that it is we Italians who create suspicion," she murmured, as she took her place.

CHAPTER XXV

Mervyn was surprised that evening when, after his bath, he found the valet, who had put out his things some time before, still lingering in the bedroom.

"What are you waiting for?" he enquired.

The man stood uneasily at the foot of the bed. He was a thin, rather saturnine-looking person, with heavy black moustache, mournful eyes, and quiet manner. He was withal an excellent servant, who understood his duties thoroughly. At the present moment, however, he was, without a doubt, nervous. He looked behind at the door leading into the sitting room which he had carefully closed.

"Mr. Amory, sir," he began, "I should like to take a liberty, if I might. I should like a word with you, please, sir."

"Very well then, fire away," Mervyn invited, sitting down and stretching out his hand for his socks.

"Monsieur would perhaps be so kind as to mention nothing of what I have to say to Luigi."

"Luigi, the waiter?" Mervyn questioned. "What's the matter? Have you been having trouble with him?"

The man changed his position slightly. There was a tired look upon his face.

"But no, Monsieur. There has been no special trouble between Luigi and myself. We do not speak

often. We think differently. We belong to different parties."

"Both of you Italians, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," the valet admitted, "only, whereas Luigi is forced to live abroad for all his life, I shall, before very long, return to Italy."

"Why is Luigi obliged to remain abroad?" Mervyn enquired.

The valet looked again at the closed door. With a word of excuse he opened it, glanced searchingly around the empty room beyond, and closed it again.

"Luigi," he confided, "is a Red Shirt. He is an exile. If he presented himself at the frontier, there would be trouble. Lately his wife had a child, and afterwards a serious illness. He dared not go back. His mother has died whilst he has been here. He was obliged to remain."

Mervyn paused in his dressing.

"Luigi seems a good enough fellow," he remarked. "Did he get into any serious trouble?"

"Only speech-making, sir. That was bad enough, though. He gets very excited. It was he who led the charge of the Red Shirts and overcame the police in the streets of Florence, during the rioting last year. He is a very difficult fellow when he is roused."

"And you are what they call a Fascist, I suppose?"

"I am of the Fascisti," Guiseppi acknowledged.

"Why do you live abroad, then?"

"I work here for the Fascisti," was the quiet reply.

"Do you mean that you are a spy, or something of that sort?"

"I am an agent of the general espionage system."

"You're a confiding sort of fellow," Mervyn observed. "Supposing I were to tell the management. You'd have to leave, wouldn't you?"

"I think not, sir. Unless I am very much mistaken, the management know already. One has to get used to that. Every Fascist abroad works still for his country when he has the opportunity, just as most of the Red Shirts hereabouts are working against it."

"What about Luigi then? Is he a spy too?"

"Certainly he is, sir."

"A nice sort of position for me, supposing I were interested in Italian affairs," Mervyn grumbled. "My valet is a Fascist and my waiter a Communist. I suppose you're serious, Guiseppi?"

"Quite, sir."

"Well, what do you want? Get along with it."

"You have been coming here for some years," Guiseppi went on slowly. "Very nice gentleman. It is always a pleasure to wait upon you, sir. You are generous, and you know how to give like a signor. That makes a great difference sometimes."

"Well, that's a good start," Mervyn conceded.

"Mr. Amory, sir," the man continued, "I want you just not to meddle with anything you do not

understand. You will not be angry with me, no? This place is full of whispers—all Monte Carlo, and this hotel especially. I know the men of our police, when I see them, and there are plenty about here. There are many others whom they watch, perhaps, but more than any one, they watch you."

"How do you know that, Guiseppi?" Mervyn asked.

"I see them," the man went on eagerly, "all the time. They make pretences to come up here. From this window I watch you leave the hotel sometimes, and always I see one of them following you. I must answer their questions, or I should be very soon in trouble when I get back to my country. My wife and children are there, and I have been a long time away already."

"That's all right, Guiseppi," Mervyn assured him, "but you know me pretty well. You're in and out of the room half the time. What is there suspicious about me?"

"Not one thing, sir," was the vehement reply. "That is what I tell them all. They go away. They come again. You would never notice it, sir, but your clothes, your wardrobe, everything you possess has been gone through twice since you arrived."

"What about the despatch box I keep locked?"

The valet smiled.

"What difference does a lock make, sir?" he rejoined. "They are of the Secret Police. They have keys for everything."

"Why are you telling me all this, Guiseppi?" Mervyn asked, after a moment's pause.

"Mr. Amory, sir," the man replied earnestly, "I tell you because I like you very much. I do not want you to get into any trouble. These men who watch you have only one way. They suspect. They watch. They make sure. They kill."

"And what is the special trouble which made you select to-night to speak to me?"

"I wish to recommend to the Signor that he does not keep his appointment at the Provençal Bar."

Mervyn whistled to himself softly.

"So you know that I am going to the Provençal Bar, do you?"

"The Signor is going to meet a messenger from the Red Shirts. It will be very dangerous for him to do so. The Signor would be well advised not to interest himself further in the affair."

"Exactly what do you mean?" Mervyn demanded.

"Signor Torrita would have told the Signor if he had enquired," Guiseppi replied reproachfully. "Italian affairs are better dealt with by Italians. The Signor has been interfering in a grave matter. It is better that he should do so no longer. There will indeed be serious trouble if he keeps his rendezvous. The Signor will not have forgotten what happened to Caterina?"

"No, I have not forgotten," Mervyn admitted, "but she was on the double-cross, wasn't she?"

"The Signor will pardon?"

"I mean that she was trying to deceive her own party?"

"She was an impostor sent by the Fascisti to take the place of the Red Shirt Caterina who was stopped at the frontier and lies now in a fortress. The Red Shirts discovered that she was an impostor, and she was murdered by them. I do not know who the Signor's companion of to-night is to be, but for both of you it will be a grave risk. The Fascisti are determined that the documents which the Signor possesses shall not reach Italy, at any rate for the present. They will run any risk to stop this. If the person who comes to-night to the Provençal Bar is really a Red Shirt—a genuine emissary—he will be killed before he can leave Monte Carlo. If he is a Fascist spy, posing as a Red Shirt, he will be killed by the Red Shirts, as Caterina was."

"Well, it all sounds very interesting, Guiseppi," Mervyn acknowledged. "We will leave to-night alone. I shall decide what to do before the time comes. The intriguing part of your confidence is what you tell me about Luigi. Two of you on the same floor of the same hotel, working against one another! Does Luigi know your position?"

"Certainly, Signor. Apart from the question of politics, we are friendly. We do not visit at one another's houses for fear we should quarrel. We work in harmony and on a fête day we sometimes take a glass together."

"Then if I keep my rendezvous," Mervyn ob-

served, "I may expect to get your knife between my shoulders, eh?"

"Not that, by any means, Signor," the man protested eagerly. "I am only an informer of the first degree. I make my reports to superiors every day, but I am not entrusted with serious matters. It will be from others more used to that sort of thing that the Signor must look for danger."

Mervyn patted the man on the shoulder.

"You're a sound fellow," he said. "Don't you worry about me. I'll be careful, I promise you that. Torrita and his merry men are barking up the wrong tree when they think that by getting rid of me they will lay their hands upon the papers."

"The Signor will pardon?"

Mervyn lit a cigarette and nodded.

"My fault, Guiseppi," he confessed. "A purely English idiom. No wonder you didn't quite get it. What I mean you to understand was that if anything happens to me, the Red Shirts will get their papers. So long as I'm alive, there's always the chance of my parting with them to the wrong person."

"The Signor has made a wise provision," the valet murmured, as he gathered up Mervyn's discarded clothes and took his leave.

CHAPTER XXVI

It chanced that Mervyn had no dinner engagement that evening. Most of his tennis friends had gone to one of those regrettable functions—a gala dinner—at one of the famous restaurants, and Lord Bremner was dining at Nice. He was not particularly hungry, and the idea of sitting down to dine alone was scarcely attractive. He strolled around the lounge of the hotel without meeting any acquaintances, and in the end decided to walk up to the bar on the hill, have some sandwiches and gamble at the Casino for an hour. It was a warm, soft night. The long tree-bordered street, with its line of automobiles, was amply lit, and, although he respected Guiseppi's advice, inasmuch as he kept away from the Gardens and walked in the middle of the road, he could not bring himself to call a little *voiture*. From his first few steps, however, he was conscious that the espionage upon his movements was as vigilant as ever. The instinctive apprehension of being followed, common to most criminals and Secret Service men, is one which speedily becomes developed, and without turning his head Mervyn knew quite well that he was being closely shadowed. He went on for some time and then stopped and looked back. There were two men talking near one of the waiting cars, another solitary man examining a tyre on the other side of the road, a man who looked as though

he might have been a croupier in a black overcoat and black Homburg hat lounging against the railings, smoking a cigarette. None of these had the air of being otherwise than harmlessly engaged, and Mervyn, after a moment's deliberation, continued on his way. Arrived at the Boulevard des Moulins, he swung quickly round once more before crossing the road. The man who had seemed to be examining a tyre, and was apparently some sort of a mechanic, was about a dozen yards away, walking slowly, and carrying a tyre lever in his hand. The other who resembled a croupier had disappeared, but Mervyn caught a glimpse of him upon the sidewalk between the cars. He felt in his hip pocket, loosened the flap, drew out the small revolver he sometimes carried with him and thrust it into his coat pocket, where it was more easily accessible. Then he proceeded on his way once more, arrived at the steps leading to the Park Palace, and began to ascend. He had scarcely reached the first turn when he realized that he had made a mistake. At that time of the evening, the place was almost deserted, and behind him he could hear the sound of soft, padding footsteps. With a sudden inspiration, and remembering his probable athletic superiority, he decided upon flight. Abandoning his customary saunter, he sprang forward and up the steps, three at a time. He heard an exclamation behind him and something which sounded like a curse. At the corner, however, his progress was checked. He ran straight into a man who was

descending, a man who seemed to receive the contretemps in particularly ominous fashion.

"Sorry," Mervyn apologised. "I'm afraid I wasn't looking where I was going. Didn't expect to meet any one just at that corner."

He tried to pass the man, who stood menacingly in his way. The latter held out his arm, however, as though to bar the passage. Mervyn struck it down, well aware of the fact that there was no time to be wasted in useless words of apology, but in that moment of hesitation they were upon him. His head was jerked back, the fingers which held the pistol were gripped as though by a vice. He was powerless to cry out, for his aggressor's hand had covered his mouth. He felt their fingers flash in and out of his pockets, felt the speedy extraction of his letter case, felt quick, nervous touches all over his body, and then suddenly heard retreating footsteps. He turned round to follow, still gasping, but the man with whom he had collided held his arm.

"What is this which has arrived?" the latter demanded, in a hoarse voice. "Are you a thief?"

"Am I a thief?" Mervyn expostulated, struggling to get free. "Can't you see that I have been robbed, whilst you held my arm? I've got you, anyhow. Come along, we'll go and look for a gendarme."

Mervyn knew a little jiujitsu, but he never had the least idea how it was that he found himself suddenly sitting upon the steps watching the other's rapid descent. He struggled up, dizzy and with ach-

ing limbs. By the time he reached the street, however, there was no one in sight answering in the least to the description of the four men. A motor car, which he remembered to have seen standing by the bank, was travelling at a rapid pace towards Mentone.—He climbed the steps once more, and entered the bar, almost deserted at that hour.

"Francis," he said, "I want a double Martini cocktail at once, afterwards a clothes brush, some sandwiches, and a *mille*."

The man looked at him in astonishment, as he threw the ice into the shaker.

"In a moment, sir. But Mr. Amory, has anything happened? Have you met with an accident?"

Mervyn opened his lips and closed them again.

"I slipped, coming up the steps—that's all," he confided. "And I have forgotten my money."

The cocktail, the clothes brush, the sandwiches, and the *mille* note were all speedily forthcoming. After a wash, Mervyn stood before the looking glass at the back of the bar and examined himself closely. Francis had retired, to continue his dinner in the inner room, and his place had been taken by his partner, Guido—a small man with dark, earnest eyes, a favourite throughout the Principality.

"Am I all right now?" Mervyn asked him.

Guido leaned across the bar. He was looking, for him, unusually serious.

"Mr. Amory," he said, "you know that I am an Italian."

"Well?"

"I was not obliged to leave my country. I live here because it is better for making money, and I have a wife and family, but all my relatives are in Italy, and many friends. I have news all the time. Things that are very strange go on there now."

"And here too," Mervyn muttered, under his breath.

"Matorni he has, what one would say, lifted his feet from the earth," Guido went on. "He soars too high. That is how people would speak if they dared —even many of his own supporters. I talk plainly because I am not in Italy, but even here, if we were not alone, I should hold my tongue. Signor Amory, do you remember a certain month of November in Rome?"

Mervyn looked down at the little man keenly.

"What of it?" he demanded.

Guido tapped himself on the chest.

"I happened to be a waiter in the small restaurant kept going for the chiefs of the Foreign Office," he confided. "The Signor would not remember me, but he passed in for interviews twice."

"I understand," Mervyn acknowledged. "Forget it as much as you can, Guido. Out here I am a tennis player. Those days are finished."

"But are they finished, Signor?" Guido queried. "To-day, if I had not seen you here, I would have given myself a liberty. I would have come to the hotel. Those things which are brewing in Italy we

can only guess at, but for some reason, even this place is full of spies. We get them in every day—men and women too—more easy for us to recognise than you. One dare not refuse to serve them. Even here, if you are an Italian, Matorni is a man to be feared. We do not like to have our clients watched, though. They watch you, Signor Amory. Take care."

Mervyn smiled.

"They fairly had me, coming up the steps, Guido," he confided. "Took my pocketbook, with fifteen *milles* in it, and, considering that I am supposed to be rather good at a rough and tumble, they treated me as though I were a baby."

The little man's face was full of distress.

"The pocketbook, Signor?" he enquired anxiously.

"Fifteen *milles* and a few visiting cards," Mervyn repeated. "I've had to borrow a *mille* from Francis."

"The Signor knows his own business," Guido said slowly, "but if he has a misson here, he should try to forget that he is a brave man. He should not move unless he is protected."

Mervyn finished the last of his sandwiches.

"What sort of a mission should I have here, Guido?" he asked. "You forget that I am an Englishman, and we've had enough for one generation of interfering in other people's quarrels. Nevertheless," he went on, "I shall take your advice. There

is some one in this place, apparently, who dislikes me. I was going to walk down to the Casino, but I won't. You shall send for a little carriage for me."

Guido bustled away into his back premises and gave an order. When he returned, his face was still troubled.

"There is one thing more," he imparted confidentially. "The Signor knows Torrita?"

"The Italian who comes here with the Princess?"

"The same," Guido assented. "The Signor knows also, perhaps, his position?"

"I know all about him," Mervyn acquiesced. "He is Chief of Matorni's Secret Police, and he hasn't been doing too well lately."

"Torrita was here this afternoon, with two of his men. They sat in the corner over there and talked. The place was almost empty. Everybody laughs at me, Signor, for my big ears, but they have their uses. I hear a long way. Torrita was very excited. He was scolding his two men. When he rose to go, I distinctly heard his parting words. 'It must be to-night,' he said. Of course, that may mean nothing to you, Signor Amory, but when you tell me that you have had an adventure coming here, then I wonder, and an open carriage is little protection, Signor. Stay here for a while, until the streets are more crowded again. Francis will be back from dinner presently. We will go down together."

"Are you in this business on either side, Guido?" Mervyn asked him curtly.

"Santa Maria, that I am not!" the little man burst out, with feverish emphasis. "I am one who wants peace and comfort for himself and his wife and children, and no more. I am a good Italian. I gave myself up for the army when war came. I was wounded, so they found me a place as waiter. But with no war I have no politics. I am not a Red Shirt; I am not a Black Shirt. I came away from Italy to be out of that."

Mervyn patted him upon the shoulder. Outside was the sound of a carriage turning round.

"You are a sensible fellow, Guido," he declared, "and I am very much obliged to you for your warnings. Remember, though, that this is Monte Carlo, not Italy. There are plenty of police about, scarcely any dark corners, and it is only a very few yards to the Casino. I think I can take that small risk."

They made their way towards the door. Outside, upon the first table, propped up against an empty box of matches, and facing them, was a large, square envelope. They both stopped and looked at it. It was addressed in a sprawling, but distinct handwriting to—*Monsieur Mervyn Amory.*

"It is for Monsieur!" Guido exclaimed. "Some one must have left it here while we were talking."

Mervyn handled it gingerly.

"I wonder whether this is a new trick?" he reflected.

Guido took the envelope from his hands, smelt it,

and, taking a small penknife from his pocket, opened the blade and inserted it under the flap.

"Monsieur permits?"

"Go ahead," Mervyn enjoined.

Guido cut across the flap and shook out the contents of the envelope. There were fifteen *mille* notes, three visiting cards, a receipted bill from Dutripon's, and four words scrawled across a half sheet of paper:

"Sorry case was cut."

The two men looked at each other.

"The fifteen *milles* of Monsieur!" Guido gasped.

Mervyn stowed the notes away in his pocket.

"Pleasing, but quixotic," he murmured.

Guido walked out with his client to where the carriage was waiting. He looked up into the driver's face.

"A Monégasque," he remarked. "All may be well. Good night, Signor."

"Good night, Guido," Mervyn rejoined, as he stepped into the *voiture*.

CHAPTER XXVII

The *cocher* cracked his whip on turning the corner, with the result that one of the horses slipped a little going down the hill, and they crossed the Boulevard des Moulins at a gallop. Upon the far pavement a girl, carrying a paper parcel, had just stepped off the kerbstone. She hesitated for a moment, glanced at the approaching vehicle, half ran forward, turned to go back, stumbled and fell. The *cocher* reined in his horses with difficulty. Mervyn stepped out and lifted the girl to her feet.

"I hope you are not hurt?" he asked kindly.

She was little more than a child—seventeen or eighteen, perhaps—neatly dressed, and pretty in the Monégasque fashion with dark, deep-set eyes and a clear complexion. She looked ruefully at her muddy skirt and the torn tissue-paper parcel which disclosed a bouquet of roses.

"It is just my foot, Monsieur," she confided.

She tried to put it down and howled.

"Where are you going?" Mervyn enquired.

"To the Port, Monsieur," she answered. "To the yacht of Milord—ah, I forget—an English milord. The name is on the card," she added, pointing to it. "It is the big yacht with the white funnel. These roses were to be there by half-past nine, so I was hurrying, and now I cannot move."

Mervyn lifted her, parcel and all, into the *voiture*. She smiled at him in delight.

"Monsieur will take me to the Port?" she exclaimed. "But that is charming!"

She made room for him by her side and looked up. Even at seventeen, there are young women of southern birth who know how to convey much with a smile. Mervyn smiled back at her and smiled even more, though in different fashion, as he caught sight of the waiting automobile on the other side of the road and the men who were leaning back to escape observation.

"For myself, young lady," he decided, "I go only a few steps farther. See, I am about to give the *cocher* fifty francs. That will be enough for him to take you to the Port and bring you back to wherever you like. There is also one hundred francs for you to pay for the damage to your skirt. I hope that your foot will be better in the morning."

She made one more effort, laying her ungloved fingers upon his arm and looking up at him with every manner of invitation in her eloquent eyes.

"My foot hurts so," she complained. "Will not monsieur come and give me a glass of Dubonnet at the Port? I feel faint."

Mervyn leapt out of the carriage.

"Young lady," he said, "if the sun were shining, and there were not so many motor cars about, I would take a little drive with you, and drink a glass of Dubonnet with pleasure, but as it is—well, *au revoir*."

He raised his hat and purposely joined in with

the half-dozen stragglers who had lingered to watch the incident. A few quick paces, and he had passed at the back of the Gardens and emerged in front of the cinema. There were gendarmes now at every corner, and many lights. He crossed the square and entered the Casino, passing through the crowded kitchen, with particular care not to linger there. Once inside the *Salles Privées* he stood watching a *trente-et-quarante* table for about a minute, then retraced his steps towards the door, coming almost at once face to face with Torrita. The two men exchanged the ordinary greetings of acquaintances. Mervyn looked down in exasperation at the Italian.

"Signor Torrita," he complained, "this is becoming monotonous."

"For myself," Torrita retorted, "it is worse—it is wearisome. It is like playing a game of cards where the other man holds all the trumps and has all the luck."

"Let us take a liqueur together in the bar," Mervyn suggested. "It will be a pleasant respite to have you by my side, and in a crowded place."

"A little conversation with you will be most agreeable," Torrita assented.

The two men ignored the stools before the bar and found easy chairs in a corner.

"In the first place," Mervyn observed, when he had given his order, "let me congratulate you upon the honesty of your footpads. The fifteen *milles* was a pleasing surprise to me. To tell you the truth, I

had been obliged to borrow at the Royalty Bar."

"Our agents," Torrita replied, "are always scrupulously honest. In your case we are in search of one thing, and one thing only. Your personal belongings are entirely sacred."

"The second affair was clever," Mervyn continued, looking up at the ceiling. "Pity I happened to notice that automobile. The child very nearly imposed upon me. The stage management was excellent, Torrita. I must congratulate your people upon it. Until I had lifted her up and put her into the *voiture*, even after I had asked her where she was going, I was as ingenuous as a babe."

"It is that ingenuous appearance of yours which has caused us so many disappointments," Torrita growled.

Mervyn smiled.

"It has been," he admitted, "of great service to me in my profession. Do you know, Torrita," he went on, after a moment's pause, "I never should have believed that so much dogged and short-sighted perseverance was a characteristic of your race. Surely we came to a clear understanding last night? Of what use could it be to you to maim me, or even murder me? If I have papers that you want, you could never get them that way. I don't carry them about with me."

"Naturally not," Torrita agreed, "but the time is getting very short now, and your temporary disappearance from the scene of action might result

in those papers not finding their way into dangerous hands until too late. With regard to last night, you knew that you were taking a certain risk, and you left definite instructions. You returned in safety, and those instructions, it is to be presumed, lapsed. For all that we know, they may not apply to any other occasion when you might be detained for a few days."

"I see your point," Mervyn conceded. "There is, of course, just that shadow of a chance. I must consider the question of making my instructions apply to any unforeseen absence on my part."

"Mr. Amory," Torrita said gravely, "it is incomprehensible to me that you should run such risks for the purpose of helping the party which is composed of the scum of the earth, and doing harm to a great patriot, a great statesman, and a hero like Matorni."

"We can neither of us see into the other's mind," Mervyn reflected. "Your point of view might lend itself to argument, but words between us would be wasted."

"You are quite right," Torrita assented. "There has been too much conversation between us on this subject. We both weary of it. We understand our positions. You have made up your mind to carry out an infamous deed. It is my business to prevent you. I shall, if I can, at any cost."

"Capital!" Mervyn murmured. "We know where we are now, then. It seems to me that we might spend

quite a stimulating evening together. I was going to gamble with these little plaques. I am not sure that it would not be more amusing to gamble with you, only you see I have everything to lose and nothing to gain."

"Nothing to gain?" Torrita repeated.

"Well, have I? I possess, or you think that I possess, something you want very badly indeed. I can assure you that I don't covet any of your possessions or your life. To be Chief of the Secret Police in the service of a passionate and arbitrary man like Matorni, and remain unsuccessful, should be punishment enough for all your misdemeanours."

"There are times," Torrita ruminated, "when success comes quite unexpectedly. It might even come to-night."

"I shouldn't count upon it," Mervyn advised. "Ah, our cognac arrives. Let us drink—but I am not sure that we can find a toast in common."

"We might drink to your success with those plaques," Torrita suggested.

"It is supposed to be unlucky, but I accept the toast," Mervyn agreed.

He raised his glass to his lips, but put it down untasted.

"Surely that is a friend of ours?" he exclaimed, leaning forward.

Torrita followed his example. The figure of a woman who was passing the doorway seemed certainly for a moment familiar. Torrita even rose to

his feet, as though about to move forward. Mervyn stood up too, but immediately afterwards subsided into his chair.

"For a moment," he confessed, "I thought it was the Princess. Directly one sees her face, however, one realises that there is no likeness. To my plaques, Signor Torrita!"

The two men drained their glasses. Mervyn made a wry face.

"The brandy here is not so good as last year," he remarked.

"I agree with you," Torrita assented. "It has a bitter taste. But then, in my country we drink little cognac. We like our own liqueurs."

"I shall now," Mervyn announced, rising to his feet, "go and try my fortune."

"I shall offer myself as a mascot to you, in this one thing only," Torrita proposed.

They made their way to a roulette table in the farther room. Mervyn sank languidly into a vacant chair.

"I don't know how it is," he remarked, "but the atmosphere of these rooms always makes me feel sleepy. Already it is beginning."

"It will pass off," Torrita yawned. "I will stand behind your chair and bring you the luck."

Mervyn played for some time with varying fortune. At last he brought off the coup which he had been attempting—fourteen and the *chevaux*. He swept the plaques and notes into his pocket.

"Torrita," he confided, "I am going to subscribe to the gambler's maxim, which no one in real life takes any notice of—I am going to leave off when I have won. To tell you the truth," he added, rising to his feet a little unsteadily, "I can scarcely keep my eyes open. I shall go across to my rooms and have an early night. Anything further doing with you to-night, Torrita? Because I tell you frankly that I don't want to be disturbed."

Torrita smiled sardonically. He steadied his companion as they threaded their way through the crowd of people.

"Nothing further from me to-night, Signor Amory," he promised. "In the Hôtel de Paris you are to a certain extent in sanctuary. We have satisfied ourselves already that what we seek is not there. For the rest, we prefer our little adventures with you in other places."

"That's lucky," Mervyn grunted. "I shall have a good night's sleep then."

The two men said good-by upon the steps. Torrita lingered there for several moments, watching the other's somewhat circuitous progress with a smile. Presently, however, he turned back to the *Salles Privées* and made his way to the bar. He sank into the same easy-chair and summoned the waiter.

"A bottle of Vichy water, Carlo."

The man executed the order. Torrita searched his pockets for change, whilst some passers-by moved out of earshot.

"It was done, Carlo?" he asked quietly.

"But naturally, Signor. I saw the sign. I understood. It was the same as with the French surveyor last month. I have only to go behind the screen there, and the thing is accomplished."

"Nothing to report from here?"

"Very little, Signor. I attend the bureau to speak what I know every Thursday."

"And the talk of the people? Do you hear much conversation?"

"I listen always. French, English and Americans are all the same. They think that the Duce becomes more mad every day, but they laugh still at the idea of war. For that, they believe he is not mad enough."

Torrita slipped across a tip which was suspiciously like a five-hundred-franc note.

"You are one of our most satisfactory men, Carlo," he said. "It will not be forgotten when the time comes."

"The Signor will find me always grateful," was the quiet acknowledgment.

CHAPTER XXVIII

At five minutes to twelve Mervyn handed his overcoat, and hat and stick to the attentive *vestiaire* and presented himself upon the threshold of the Provençal Bar. The manager promptly deserted a promising-looking party of Americans to welcome his distinguished client and personally conducted him to the same little round table in a remote but desirable corner. His face was wreathed in smiles, his body contorted with bows. When Mervyn was seated, however, with his finger carefully tapping the menu as though anxious to call Mervyn's attention to some particular article of diet, he leaned forward and dropped his voice.

"There is a trouble," he confided. "Monsieur will find underneath his napkin a letter. Monsieur will please remain here and sup, if only for half an hour. The place is watched, and if he leaves without excuse, there will be suspicions that a communication has arrived."

Mervyn listened without change of countenance.

"I think we can do better than that," he said, letting his finger stray a little farther down the menu. "We may be able to put them off the scent altogether. Mademoiselle Alice sits there alone. Let her understand that I leave shortly, but that if she will take supper with me, she will find a *mille* note under her plate."

Once more smiles broke across Ferrari's face.

"Monsieur has genius," he murmured. "It is arranged."

"Give me three minutes," Mervyn whispered, "to read the note. I shall probably go to the bar and drink a cocktail. As for supper, serve what you will, and a bottle of Clicquot '15."

Ferrari withdrew, his expression denoting nothing more than the complete satisfaction of the *maître d'hôtel* who has received a pleasing command. In a few moments, Mervyn slipped his hand under the napkin and transferred a small, long envelope to his pocket. He strolled out to the bar and seated himself upon a high stool.

"A dry cocktail, Dan," he ordered. "Plenty of gin."

The man turned smilingly around to take his bottle from the shelf. With the fingers of his left hand, Mervyn broke the seal of the envelope and drew out its contents, carefully mixing up the slip of paper with half a dozen hundred-franc notes which had been loose in his pocket. He glanced around lazily. The occupants of the other stools were negligible. He withdrew his hand from his pocket, put down a hundred-franc note in payment for his cocktail, smoothed out the strip of paper, and read the few lines printed in pen and ink:

"Dangerous here. In your rooms at three o'clock."

Mervyn yawned and tore the strip of paper into

small pieces. He sipped his cocktail, grumbled a little at the flavouring, accepted the addition of more French vermouth, and conversed for some time with Dan about the prospects of a tennis tournament later in the season. On his way back into the room, he met Mademoiselle Alice advancing towards him expectantly.

"Monsieur invites me to supper?" she asked eagerly.

"If Mademoiselle will give me the pleasure," he answered. "I sent a message by Ferrari. Shall we dance?"

"Certainly, Monsieur."

They danced until the orchestra stopped, and demanded an encore. Mervyn exchanged greetings with a few friends, some of whom watched him curiously.

"Not often Amory breaks out," one man remarked to his companion.

The latter shrugged her shoulders.

"Nothing serious—I'll guarantee that," she said. "Mr. Amory is no fool. If a man comes to one of these places alone, he's a mark for every one. He is much more sensible to choose the nicest little *danseuse* here to sit at his table."

Mervyn led Mademoiselle Alice to his corner.

"I know all about it," she confided good-humouredly. "I wish it were for longer. I wish it it were for the whole evening. I wish that it were for much longer than that. But you are very difficult to please, are you not, Mr. Amory?"

"I should be," he answered, "if I did not find you charming. It is only that to-night I have another engagement, and it is *triste* here alone."

"Perhaps when you see how very nicely I behave," she went on, "you observe what pleasure it gives me to be with you, and how, when my half an hour is up, I go away like a good little girl, we shall have another dance and supper, some day, yes?"

"Why not?" Mervyn acquiesced. "There is just one other thing I will ask you. If we are interrupted, or if any one questions you after I have gone, remember that you have been engaged to sup with me for several evenings. We are old acquaintances, and it is you whom I came here to see."

"That will make me very proud to say," the young lady assured him. "Caviare! But that is wonderful! They are supposed to give us our supper here. What is it, I ask you? Two sandwiches and a bottle of champagne upon the table, unopened until some kind gentleman comes along. May I keep this table after you have gone?"

"For as long as you like," Mervyn assented, "and order whatever you fancy to eat and drink also."

"It is a night of great good fortune!" the girl murmured.

They danced again and returned to their places to find grilled chicken awaiting them. Mademoiselle Alice was in ecstasies.

"And to think that to-night of all nights I could eat no dinner," she exclaimed. "I went to a dress-

maker's at Nice who kept me for a long time, and when I returned everything that I had ordered was spoilt. Forgive me that I am hungry."

Mervyn smiled.

"It is a compliment to my supper," he observed. "To tell you the truth, I dined lightly myself, for various reasons. I must congratulate Ferrari upon his chicken."

And then, when they were in the middle of the feast, there was a little stir of interest, almost of commotion, at the door. Torrita entered, but a Torrita who was not quite himself. There was scarcely a person in the room who did not believe that he was drunk. His eyes were red, he stood unsteadily upon his feet, his hair was ruffled. Ferrari hastened up with words of remonstrance upon his lips which died away as he recognised his visitor. With a sweep of the arm, Torrita pushed him on one side. He had the air of a man making a great effort. He walked almost steadily to the table where Mervyn was seated, placed the palm of his left hand against the wall, and, leaning there, looked intently at Mervyn's companion.

"A bluff!" he declared. "A magnificent bluff! Signor Amory, I am beginning to admire you, but I am also beginning to dislike you very much."

"You seem disturbed, Torrita," Mervyn observed calmly. "The *convenances* must always be respected. Since you are interested in my companion, permit

me to present you. Signor Torrita—Mademoiselle Alice."

Torrita attempted a bow. There were strange things in his face. His eyes were more than ordinarily bloodshot, his cheeks indrawn. There were little beads of froth upon his lips.

"It was cleverly done, Amory," he acknowledged, speaking very hoarsely and as though with great difficulty. "The woman who passed like the Princess, and the rest of it, the changing the glasses during the only moment I looked away! Your own bluff as you left the Casino! It was cleverly done, but as yet I have not lost. I should not be here, but I know of the antidote. As it is, I am ill; I shall be worse—but mark you this, Amory, the sword is still drawn. You see what has happened to your assignation of to-night. It is fortunate for Mademoiselle here that one knows of her. If you and that other meet, if that assignation which was to have been takes place after all, and takes effect, what do I do? I shall tell you. I kill first you and then myself."

"Sounds rather cowardly," Mervyn commented. "If you lose, why not acknowledge defeat, and—pardon me—for your sake more than mine, I must point out that our conversation is becoming of some interest to others. You have, unfortunately, the appearance of a man who has drunk too much wine. Should I have been like that, I wonder?"

"You would have been worse," was the unsteady reply. "You would have known nothing of the anti-

dote. You would have been in a stupor for many hours—perhaps days—perhaps for ever."

"You make me all the more glad," Mervyn confided, "that in my youth I was noted for a certain sleight of hand—tricks at children's parties, you know, and that sort of thing. Take care, Torrita, I beg of you. You are frightening Mademoiselle. You attract notice. You really are not fit for polite society."

Torrita probably retained consciousness enough to know that he was in a parlous state. He summoned together what was left to him of self-control, bowed ironically to Mademoiselle Alice, who shivered as she met his eyes, and made his way down the room. The waiters paused in their tasks to glance at him. They were all Italians, exiles who were there for a certain reason. Ferrari bowed him out with something of the same look in his eyes. The leader of the orchestra ventured upon no farewell salute; the *vestiaire*, ever eager for tips, turned his back. It was an atmosphere of hate from which Torrita passed.

Mademoiselle Alice returned to her supper with diminished enthusiasm.

"That man has frightened me," she complained. "Before he came I was so hungry and so happy. I could not understand all that he said, but it sounded terrible. Why is he angry with you?"

"These Italians are a bad-tempered lot," Mervyn replied. "If I were you, I shouldn't bother about

him. You see how disliked he was by every one here. I am going to have your chicken made hot again. Drink that," he went on, filling her glass, "and then we dance until the chicken is ready."

He gave an order to a waiter, a signal to the leader of the orchestra, and they danced. Soon the colour came back to the girl's cheeks. Her movements, which had been heavy at first, became lissom. She smiled once more up into her partner's face.

"I like you so much," she murmured. "I wish you would come often and dance with me. They say that you are a great tennis player; is that so?"

"I have also work to do in the world, Mademoiselle," he told her.

She shrugged her shoulders daintily.

"The men whom one likes, they all have work," she said. "You think, perhaps, because I am a *danseuse*, that it is the others only whom I like. It is not true. If I had my way—ah, what do you think, Monsieur, would happen, if I had my way?"

"You must tell me," he suggested.

"I would marry a good, kind man who lived in the country. If he had education and was *gentil*, he could be a vine grower, a flower grower, even a farmer. I would like better that he were an *avocat* who might some day become a judge—but one cannot choose. And I would like to live somewhere near the mountains down here in the south, with sunshine —plenty of sunshine!"

"And what about your dancing?" he asked.

"It would not sound ungracious, I hope, Monsieur," she sighed, as he led her to the table, "to say that I would like never to dance again. You see," she went on, "it is not always like this. I have to dance with whoever asks me. That is sometimes disagreeable."

Ferrari, who had been loitering restlessly about, came up to their table as soon as they were seated.

"But what had happened to Torrita?" he asked anxiously. "I have never seen him like that."

"I doubt whether you ever will again," Mervyn replied. "I believe, as a matter of fact, he had been testing one of his own drugs—a dangerous thing to do at any time."

Ferrari was obviously uneasy.

"He was very angry," he said. "It was nothing that could have happened here?"

"Make yourself at ease," Mervyn enjoined. "No trouble is likely to come to you for Torrita's condition. And now, alas, Mademoiselle," he added, turning towards his companion, "my time is up. The bill is paid. The little present I had intended for you," he continued, as his fingers met hers under the table, "I venture to add to. I thank you for a very charming hour."

"You will come again?" she begged eagerly.

Mervyn, who had risen to his feet, laid his hand upon Ferrari's shoulder.

"Ferrari here finds me rather a troublesome client," he confided.

"A very welcome one," the *maître d'hôtel* declared reproachfully.

"In which case, Mademoiselle Alice," Mervyn promised, with a little valedictory bow, "we will dance together again before long."

That vein of temperamental equanimity which had stood Mervyn in good stead during various moments of crisis, to some extent forsook him in the final half-hour of his tryst. Ferrari escorted him to the street, and he left the Provençal Bar without incident. It chanced that a couple of his acquaintances were leaving at the same time, and the three men crossed the square together with no contretemps. The great hall of the Hôtel de Paris was sombrely empty, but a night porter emerged from behind the *concierge's* desk, and took Mervyn up to his floor in the lift. The dimly lit corridors were deserted; he satisfied himself, after a brief exploration, that his rooms also were unoccupied. He glanced across the square to the Casino clock. It was ten minutes to three—ten minutes before he was to receive that mysterious visitor. He poured himself out some whiskey from his own flask and splashed in some soda water—he had drunk nothing at the Provençal—lit a cigarette, and drew an easy-chair up in front of the window. The night was warm, and although there was as yet no trace of the dawn, and the moon itself was young, a violet twilight had taken the place of the darkness, through which the lights in the

square and in the streets shone fancifully. A curious tranquillity seemed to rest upon the place. It was a little late for the revellers and too early for the commencement of the market traffic. Even Monte Carlo, for a brief spell of time, was breathing out a spirit of rest. The wind had died away, and the trees in the avenue leading up to the Boulevard were motionless.

At five minutes to three he rose restlessly to his feet, left the room and examined his outside door. He opened it an inch or two and turned on the light in the little hall. Then he broke open the revolver he had been carrying, saw that it was charged, and thrust down the safety catch. After all, the representative of the Red Shirts need not be such a terrible person. Uguello himself had been a man of harmless appearance, and he, Mervyn Amory, at any rate should be free of any fear of violence from them. He walked restlessly up and down the room. Despite himself, he watched anxiously the long hand of the Casino clock as it moved on towards the hour. It arrived. From somewhere in the background silvery chimes from the church steeple rang out—one—two—three. With a punctuality almost ominous, he heard the soft pushing back of the outside door—a moment later, an imperative tapping upon the inner one. He threw it open. The girl who slipped past him smiled for a moment into his amazed face, then swung around, and motioned him to turn the key in the lock.

CHAPTER XXIX

To Mervyn it was like a brief moment of actually suspended life. For the first few seconds he could neither speak nor move. Rosetta, on the other hand, was electric. There was no sign of emotion or undue hurry in her manner. She frowned a little at his dilatoriness.

"Quickly!" she enjoined. "I believe that there is no one about, but one may as well be sure. Turn out the light in the hall first, and then lock the door."

He obeyed mechanically. When he came back into the room, she had thrown on one side a black beflowered Spanish shawl she had been wearing, and was standing with her back to the window.

"But Rosetta," he exclaimed, "I don't understand. What are you doing here? You see the hour."

She nodded.

"I thought I was very punctual."

"You!" he gasped.

She moved to the writing table, took out half a sheet of note-paper, wrote a line or two upon it, added a word at the bottom, and passed it to him.

"Satisfied?" she enquired.

"I am satisfied," he acknowledged.

She tore the half-sheet of paper into minute fragments and stood smiling at him.

"I do not suppose that you have here what I want," she said, "but now you know. I leave for

Italy at twelve o'clock to-morrow morning. I must take the papers with me. That is possible?"

"Quite possible. But how do you go? The frontier, they tell me, is almost impassible."

She smiled up at him again.

"I travel with Torrita. Matorni sent for him to-night. We go to Rome together."

Mervyn held his head for a moment.

"Rosetta," he begged, "you must forgive me, but what does it mean? You travel with Torrita. Tell me whom you are representing at this moment?"

"The Red Shirts," she answered calmly. "It is quite true. Even my father, in his lifetime, had every sympathy with their principles. If he were alive now, he would probably have been their chief. He would never tolerate the shoddy imperialism, the democratic insolence of a person like Matorni, however great his attainments. I am, as many other of the aristocrats are, for the people of Italy. That we will talk of later."

"But Torrita!" he exclaimed. "How have you managed to live under the same roof and conceal your sympathies? Torrita, after all, is no fool. Unless," he added, with a sudden inspiration—

She checked him, shaking her head.

"Torrita, of course, is Matorni's man," she said. "He is clever enough in his way, but like so many persons of that class, he lacks vision. The things which are under his nose are the most difficult for him to see. After all, though, so far as I am con-

cerned, I give him no chance. I never mention politics. He would naturally conclude that Lucilla and I were of the same way of thinking—as we seem to be, in fact, if we talk seriously at all. Then there is another thing. I am one of those only called upon in a case of supreme emergency. Months have gone by without my having received a single communication from the Red Shirts."

"I'm afraid you'll think I'm very stupid or very incredulous," he confessed. "Let me hear you say it in plain words. You are going to travel with Torrita into Italy, carrying the papers which I shall give you, without his knowledge."

"Precisely. It sounds fantastic, I know, but can you conceive a safer way of getting them there? We are free of all examinations at the customs; our passports are only a matter of form. Every branch of civil or military authority in Italy is extended for our protection. Torrita may not be the most agreeable of travelling companions, but he is at any rate an invaluable one.—Give me some soda water, please; I am thirsty."

He poured out some from the syphon on the sideboard. She drank, took a cigarette from his box, and lit it.

"And to think," he reflected, looking down at her, "that for half an hour in this room I walked up and down, wondering what sort of a person I was about to receive."

She laughed softly.

"A shock for you, dear Mervyn?" she asked, stretching out her hand and taking one of his.

He sat on the arm of her chair.

"It means the readjustment of a few ideas," he confided. "Do you think you got here unobserved?"

"I think so," she answered. "You see, Torrita's men would never dream of suspecting me any more than Torrita himself. You are known to be my admirer, and it would probably be my reputation only which would suffer if my visit here were known."

"You didn't meet any one coming up?"

"Not a soul. Of course, you understand how I came. I dined with the Rothlings, some Americans who are over here. Then we went to the Sporting Club, and I played *chemin de fer* with them and some other people I know. It was all quite easy. When the time arrived I slipped out of the room, came along the passage, took the lift on to the first floor, walked up the stairs, and here I am. Now if you please, prepare to part with your great secret. Where are Uguello's papers?"

"They are in the most obvious place in the world," he answered; "in the vaults at the bank. I took them up there the moment I arrived, under pretence of being in a hurry to get some money."

She nodded thoughtfully.

"Quite a sound idea. Tell me, have Torrita's men been after you to-night?"

"I should say so!" he assured her grimly. "Also

Torrita himself. I hope he'll be well enough to travel with you to-morrow morning. He made a mistake and took a little mixture which was meant for me at the *Salles Privées* this evening."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

He described the events of the last few hours. When he had finished she looked up at him, and in her brown eyes there was a gleam of something more than respect, of positive admiration.

"You really are a very wonderful person," she declared, "or else you have had all the luck."

He stooped down, and her head rested for a moment upon his shoulder.

"I have all the luck in the world," he murmured.

"You mean about me?" she asked, smiling.

"I mean about you," he assented. "In other matters, I am not so sure. I am inclined to put down my success so far to a super-human adroitness and intelligence."

She indulged in a little grimace.

"Conceit!" she murmured. "That is all because of the other night, I suppose. No more nonsense now, please. Tell me how we are to finish our business together."

"At what time do you start?" he asked.

"At twelve o'clock."

"Very well, then," he proposed. "I will be at the bank at half-past eleven. I will get my packet and sit reading the paper until you come. You can ask for some Italian money and then join me and sit down

and talk for a moment or two. You will be carrying some sort of bag, I suppose, which you can place upon the table, and which I can take up and admire. The next time you open it, you will find the papers. If I am watched to the bank, they will wait until I come out. You are the last person they would dream of suspecting."

"That's settled, then," she agreed. "Turn down the lights for a moment, please. I want to see your view before I go."

He obeyed, and they stood together arm in arm, looking out seaward. The Casino was dark now and forbidding in its grotesqueness, and the lamps in the street were few. The moon had gained strength, and the outlines of the coast were visible. Cap Martin was almost sinister in its blackness. She pointed to the few remaining lights.

"The Château!" she murmured. "Lucilla is probably gazing out to sea and thinking of her hero."

"Wondering where you've got to, very likely," he suggested. "Hadn't I better start you off, dear?"

"You mustn't move," she enjoined. "The car is waiting for me outside the Sporting Club. I shall go back the way I came."

"Can't I take you?" he begged. "It wouldn't be in the least an unheard-of thing for me to go into the Club at half-past three. I might have been out to dance or something. If there is any '*chemin*' going on, I suppose the bar is still open."

She shook her head firmly.

"We should be certain to meet some of the people coming away," she reminded him. "I am afraid that until half-past eleven o'clock to-morrow morning you will have to be patient."

He frowned discontentedly.

"When are you coming back?" he asked.

"When should you like me to come back, Mervyn?"

He reckoned it out.

"You are motoring, I suppose?"

She nodded.

"I don't think even Torrita could push through by train."

"And where have you to take the packet?"

"No further than Rome," she admitted.

"You might get back by Thursday night," he suggested hopefully.

She laughed.

"But my dear man," she protested, "whilst I am in Rome I shall want some frocks."

"Absolutely unnecessary," he declared. "For one thing, you have plenty—I've never seen you in the same one twice—and for another, you can buy them here at half price. I heard a woman say to-day that all the dressmakers here and in Nice are frightened to death, and are selling everything out for practically nothing."

"It is an idea," she murmured. "You know," she added softly, "I am sure I shall not want to stay away longer that I can help. With this thing off

our minds, we might perhaps be able to think a little about ourselves."

"We'll announce our engagement," he proposed, "directly you get back. People are tired of talking about the war. I've been to see the chaplain already. It seems there won't be any trouble at all about our getting married."

She clung to him for a moment silently. Then she turned regretfully away.

"We talk a great deal of nonsense, Mervyn, sometimes," she said, "but I am really very fond of you. Just to the door, please. Not a step farther."

She stole away, and he heard her swift footsteps pass safely along the corridor. Then with the lights still turned off, he stood upon the balcony and waited. Five minutes—ten minutes—a quarter of an hour. Then he heard the sound of an automobile, saw the great twin lights come flashing round the corner, caught a glimpse of a slim figure leaning forward from the dark interior, a white hand which fluttered for a moment from the window and disappeared. As he lingered there, a thin, silvery pencil of light shone through the darkness eastwards.

CHAPTER XXX

Soon after half-past eleven on the following morning, Rosetta, very smart and distinctive in her brown travelling clothes and small hat, came through the swing doors of the bank and approached the table where Mervyn sat waiting. She greeted him with the sweetest of smiles, and he was more than ever thankful for the custom which permitted him to raise her fingers to his lips. She was carrying a beautiful despatch box of morocco leather.

"My store of jewels," she remarked, opening it. "I am going to leave some of them at Rome."

They sat down at the table together for a few moments, and Mervyn slipped the packet which he had been hiding under a newspaper into one of the compartments of the despatch box. There were only a few English people in the bank, and they were quite unobserved.

"The great deed, safely accomplished at last," he smiled. "All the same, I would rather have parted with them to any one else."

"Why?" she asked.

"Well, mine hasn't been altogether a peaceful guardianship," he reminded her. "I should hate to think that you would have to go through anything of the same sort."

"I shall not," she assured him quietly. "You see, every one knew or guessed that you had the papers.

There isn't any one in the world who would suspect me."

"Not even Torrita?"

"Not even Torrita."

"By-the-by, how is he this morning?" Mervyn enquired.

"Not at his best, but a little excited. Matorni sent for him yesterday. I gather their idea is that it is too late now for even the publication of the papers to affect their plans. I fancy the trouble is very near indeed, Mervyn."

He became more serious.

"It shows what limited sympathies we really possess," he remarked. "All that I find myself able to think of is that if war comes, you will not be able to get back again."

She looked around. They were still absolutely isolated.

"I believe," she confided, "that the 'incident' is arranged for the fourteenth of this month. That will give me plenty of time."

Mervyn nodded.

"There's my car," he reflected. "We shall always have that. I have a route planned out, but somehow I don't fancy we shall ever need it, except for our honeymoon. And that reminds me."

He felt in his waistcoat pocket, drew her hand towards him, and something flashed upon her finger.

"In a bank!" she gasped. "Mervyn, how could you!"

"What else could I do?" he demanded. "I couldn't let you go without this little badge of servitude, and I know you won't let me drive with you, even so far as the Château."

She held his hand very tightly for a moment, but she shook her head.

"You know why, dear," she reminded him. "When I come back, everything will be perfectly all right. In fact, there is no reason why you should not pay a visit of ceremony upon Lucilla and tell her the news. She likes you, and I think she'll be quite relieved to be freed from the charge of me. Matorni takes all her thoughts, and her one desire is to be nearer to him. I have some trustees, of course, to be told formally, but they don't really matter, now that I am of age."

Bremner, who had just entered the bank, came across and exchanged greetings.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, you young people," he said reprovingly, "sitting here, holding hands whilst every one else is trying to squeeze every franc and lira they can out of the bank before things go pop. There's no sterling left—I can tell you that—and very little French currency."

"Is there any fresh news this morning?" Mervyn asked.

"Nothing authentic. There's a terrible row going on in Germany, though. The Military Commission there have wired reports to London and Paris that they have found two hundred aeroplanes built os-

tensibly for commercial purposes transformed into bomb carriers, with engines, too, which would bring them over the Alps. Headlines in all the London papers, I believe."

"That sounds ugly," Mervyn admitted. "Any news from Rome?"

"Line blocked," Bremner answered tersely. "Not a word."

Rosetta rose to her feet. The two men walked with her to the steps.

"As my trustee, sir," Mervyn announced, "I think it my duty to inform you that we think of being married immediately Rosetta returns from Rome."

"God bless my soul!" Lord Bremner exclaimed, a twinkle in his eyes. "Will any psychologist explain to me why, directly there is a war, or a rumour of a war, people who aren't engaged get engaged, and people who are engaged want to get married?"

"It's an interesting problem, but it doesn't happen to affect us," Mervyn confided, "because I wanted to marry Rosetta the moment I saw her, and that was before there was any question of war."

They all three stood on the top of the steps. It was a typical Monte Carlo morning. The air was warm with sunshine, and there was a gentle breeze in the trees. The flower beds in the Gardens were a riot of colour. Somewhere just out of sight a man was playing a violin.

"The statesman who brought war here," Bremner pronounced, "would deserve to have his name taken

out of the book of history. Fancy the roar of guns on those blue mountains, the black smoke rolling round the Observatory there, spits of flame from those peaceful-looking vineyards. Horrible!"

Rosetta and Mervyn were standing with clasped hands. It was her reluctant farewell.

"There must be no war," he declared.

"There shall be no war," she whispered.

The car drove off, and the two men climbed the steps to the Royalty Bar. Mervyn, walking slowly and with frequent glances behind, tried to reconstruct the drama of the night before, but in the sunlight and under the spell of this new exaltation, the whole affair seemed suddenly absurd and unreal. That any one could have tried to do him an injury in this light-hearted and crowded neighbourhood was ridiculous; that Guido, welcoming them with such a natural and beaming smile, as he ushered them towards one of the striped umbrellas, should ever have breathed serious words in his ear was surely a fantastic improbability. Mervyn, stretched out in his chair, sat and looked upon the scene with an air of dreamy content. Bremner watched him with a smile at once good-humoured and sardonic.

"Altogether, Mervyn," he acknowledged, "I think you're entitled to whole-hearted congratulations. I'm a trifle old-fashioned in some things, and it seems to me there are a damned sight too many of you young fellows who keep single, and either hang about with other men's wives, or live on adventures. If I

had a son I should want to see him married young, and as you're my next responsibility I'm glad you're for it. We'll break our rule and drink a double cocktail to the young woman."

He summoned Francis and gave an order. Mervyn pulled himself together.

"It's one of those things, sir," he confided, "that make one feel such an idiot to talk about. I never read a love story if I can help it. I'm afraid I've too great a sense of humour to appreciate them. Always seems to me one odd person might feel that way, but he couldn't very well go barking about it. Now I'm one of the odd persons, and I'm damned glad."

"The modern young man's love song," Bremner summarised, with a smile. "I like it, Mervyn. I like the girl's name, too—Rosetta. And, leaving humans alone, I like more than anything I've seen this morning the sight of these foaming glasses."

"Very good cocktail, Milord," Francis declared. "I make him myself. When the Dutch gentlemen come here, they drink four, five, six of these in the morning."

"Not bad judges," Mervyn admitted.

"To Rosetta."

"To Rosetta," Mervyn echoed, with a quaint, new feeling of shyness.

Then Général de Parnouste bore down upon them, and the talk was of war.

CHAPTER XXXI

Never had there been such days in the Principality since Monte Carlo first took its place as one of the foremost of the pleasure resorts of the world. People no longer talked of gambling losses, of the new young men scooped up by the elderly sirens of the place, of Monsieur le Duc's latest conquest, of the night scandals of the cabarets. There were other and more serious matters to discuss in this perfervid atmosphere of tension and alarm. There was not the slightest doubt about the trouble in Germany, notwithstanding the scare headlines with which it had been heralded, and, as the *Times* boldly stated, if certain secret information had not come to the knowledge of the Allied Military Mission, in a month's time Germany would have had several hundred war machines of a new and most dangerous type, ready for immediate action. Against whom were these to have been used? For whose service were they intended? The question remained unanswered in print, but there was scarcely a pacifist found able to deny their sinister significance. The Governments of France, England and Belgium made formal demand for the disarmament of the whole fleet. Germany, as usual, temporized. Here indeed was matter enough for serious comment and alarm. The machines were built to fly at a great height. What obstacle could have been in the minds of their designers, except the Alps? There were many sensa-

tional stories of their projected southward flight, and much gossip from Grenoble and Briançon of mysterious airships which had suddenly appeared and disappeared from the clouds. Nearer home, frontier incidents were of almost daily occurrence, and although access to Italy had become practically impossible, and a rigid censorship had been placed upon all news, it was certain that between Genoa and Turin a large number of troops was being massed.

Throughout France, although there was an absolute lack of panic, a curious state of indecision seemed to prevail, shared equally by the political and the military authorities. A certain section of the latter were strongly opposed to depleting the troops already guarding the eastern boundary until a settlement with Germany with regard to the airships was arrived at. Others pointed to Germany's military weakness, pointed out the dangers of a sudden military *coup* upon the Côte d'Azur, and demanded that the whole military strength of the nation should be directed towards protecting the southern coast. The position of England was debated in every quarter. There was a certain amount of mystery about it, for whilst the Prime Minister was reported to have given pledges to his Cabinet that under no circumstances should the country be drawn into another European war, the fact remained that there were frequent and friendly conferences between Whitehall and the French military authorities. Then, when things seemed at their greatest possible

tension, and every moment the few remaining pleasure-seekers of the Principality were expecting to hear the guns at Mentone, a new factor crept into the situation. It was Guido who brought the news, and it was Lord Bremner and Mervyn to whom he first imparted it. Although nothing had been heard of Torrita since his departure for Rome, and the local espionage seemed to have become a thing of the past, he was particularly careful to choose a moment when his patrons were alone and the adjoining tables were empty.

"There is news from Italy," he confided to Mervyn. "Not much known—true news, though. In Milan, two nights ago, a mob of Red Shirts stormed the Palazzo Municipale in protest against the latest call to the Colours. In Genoa twenty thousand reservists refused to take up arms, and there were demonstrations in Verona and Florence. In Rome, some one had painted in the night across the Palazzo where Matorni lived a single sentence in flaming red:

'We will not have war or a Dictator.
Italy demands peace.'

Whilst three men painted, there were fifty thousand who kept back the guard."

Bremner and Mervyn exchanged quick glances. For the former it was the end of a long period of strain. Mervyn waited until Guido was out of earshot.

"Rosetta has succeeded!" he exclaimed. "The message has been delivered."

"It appears so," Bremner acquiesced. "The only question is whether it is in time. Matorni may have all the men he needs under arms, and his civil guards may be able to deal with the rioting."

"They may, but I don't think they will," Mervyn declared hopefully. "What nation in their senses could wish such a war as Matorni is planning? Supposing this great project of his were successful, supposing he occupied Mentone and the whole coast as far as Nice, how could he possibly hold them against France? Their cession was the natural result of the enfeeblement of Italy and the growing power of France. Compare the two countries to-day in population, virility and resources. In every one of the three France justifies its present position. Italy may come to its own again, but not yet. Matorni wears the seven-leagued boots, but he cannot drag time along with him."

"No man yet has ever succeeded in bending the will of the people," Bremner agreed. "If the desire for peace in Italy is genuine, there will be no war. It depends upon the strength of the Red Shirts."

"I will tell you one thing," Mervyn added, as they strolled off to lunch, "if there were half a million Red Shirts in Italy last week, there are a million by now, and there will be two million next week. It won't be the first time that the sanity which a ruler may lose is preserved by the people."

For several days there was a lull in the fierce outbursts of belligerency which the Italian authorities had seemed deliberately to encourage. The fever remained, however, although in a smouldering state. The representative of a neutral power, who suggested a conference and made certain allusions to the League of Nations, was very nearly given his papers in Rome, and Matorni issued a brief statement in which he announced that Italy in this time of tribulation would, as ever in the past, seek for and attain her own salvation. The proclamation was the signal for another great Red Shirt outburst which spread even to Rome. The Red Shirts found a leader—the Comte de Cressi—a veteran aristocrat, who had once held a portfolio and had been a confidant of the King. He demanded the immediate reopening of Parliament, and when his arrest was ordered by Matorni, a guard of ten thousand Red Shirts encamped in front of his Palazzo and defied the civil authorities who would have carried him off for trial. Meanwhile, frontier incidents increased again in violence every day. It seemed impossible that a week could pass without an act of war being committed. Just as they could, in twos or threes, whenever a seat in a train or a car was available, the remaining visitors in Monte Carlo continued to dribble away. There were only two fours left upon the tennis courts; the golf links had been closed by order of the military authorities. And then, in the midst of that dramatic lull which seemed as though it could be

followed only by the breaking of the storm, Rosetta returned.

Mervyn was at the Château within twenty minutes of receiving the telephone message. He found Rosetta waiting for him in the little pavilion overlooking the sea, and her greeting—their first few minutes of incoherent absurdities—seemed to him overwhelmingly momentous. The completeness of her surrender only matched the inevitability of his own convictions. Whatever might happen to these two harassed countries, their lips had met in the atmosphere of undying promise.

"And now?" she asked, as she passed one arm through his and with the other hand smoothed her hair.

"Monte Carlo is only the arena for rumours," he replied. "We know nothing. Personally I find it quite wonderful. With Torrita seem to have vanished all his myrmidons."

"How dull for you!" she laughed.

He made a little grimace.

"Between ourselves," he confided, "I was getting a little tired of it. To be shadowed day and night by rubber-soled vagabonds, the prey of dancing girls, the suggested dupe of flower-carrying mannequins —well, it's all right for a time, but it palls. Now nobody takes the slightest notice of me. I am once more a harmless English tennis player who may or may not be good enough to get a couple of games in a

set with a champion. I have relapsed into complete obscurity. How about you?"

She was momentarily serious.

"Just of myself," she said, "there is little to tell. Customs, passport officers—nothing mattered. Torrita rushed me through to Rome, engrossed all the time with his own affairs. Three hours after I arrived, my mission was ended."

"And these risings of the Red Shirts?" he asked curiously. "Are they really due to the publication of Uguello's letters?"

"Absolutely," she declared. "There have been meetings in every town of Italy, newspapers have been burnt by the million copies, but nevertheless the thing has spread. The people have begun to realise that they are being tricked into war, and, alas—it is heresy to say so in this atmosphere—but I fear that madness has come to Matorni."

"He perseveres?"

She nodded.

"It seems as though nothing would induce him to stay his hand. Day by day the cry of the people grows louder. The King has sent for him. He refused to go. There was a message from the Vatican; he left it unanswered: 'It is I who speak for Italy,' he said to my uncle, only the day before yesterday. 'There is no need for any other voice.' Listen!"

She held up her finger. They both left the pavilion and stood outside, looking across towards Vinti-

mille. Distinctly they could hear the sharp ping of rifles.

"They are firing!" Rosetta exclaimed. "It has begun!"

He shook his head.

"I'm not so sure," he said. "Listen! Those are not volleys; those are individual rifle shots. It is probably, after all, just another frontier affair."

She clung to his arm.

"Have you forgotten?" she asked. "This is the fourteenth of the month."

CHAPTER XXXII

For the middle of the season, the restaurant of the Hôtel de Paris presented a strange appearance that night. The orchestra played as usual, the dignified *maîtres d'hôtel* paraded the room, a small army of waiters cultivated attitudes of wistful indolence, Monsieur Deuillet, after a glance inside, departed, groaning. There were two gentlemen from the Argentine at one table, who had brought with them a system which they intended to work out to the bitter end, or until the shells were falling into the Principality. There were half a dozen stragglers, who were there because without a colossal fee it was impossible for them to leave. And, at a chosen table, smothered with flowers and waited upon with meticulous care, Lucilla and Rosetta—the guests of Bremner and Mervyn. The Princess was terribly pale, and the rings under her sad eyes bespoke a great anxiety. Bremner was doing his best to combat by fanciful speech the gloom of their surroundings.

"If Norway and Sweden were to quarrel," he observed, "who would care? I shouldn't, for one. Let them have it out and have done with it. A fight between Jersey and Guernsey would leave me unmoved, and if Corsica and Sardinia got quarrelsome—well, it would only inspire in me a mild curiosity. But for two grown-up nations like France and Italy to breathe thunders at each other across this atmos-

phere of peace and joy and gaiety strikes me as being both inconsiderate and selfish. This poor little pleasure spot has become almost a desert."

Lucilla smiled wearily.

"For an Englishman, Lord Bremner is sometimes unaccountably frivolous," she remarked.

"But is it, after all, frivolity?" Rosetta demanded. "I think the idea of war is hateful—hateful and wicked."

"Yet it has always been war," Lucilla reminded them, "which has purged the world. It may bring out some of the worst, but it certainly brings out some of the best in human nature. You, Lord Bremner, who are a student of history, should remember the wave of chivalry brought out by the Holy War. It made your nation for a time almost a nation of idealists."

"Would it be trite, I wonder, to say that times have changed?" Mervyn suggested diffidently. "The warfare of to-day is a brutal, ugly affair. Think! Supposing it comes; you might have an aeroplane over La Turbie in forty-eight hours; you might have a shell drop in the *place* there in front of the Casino which would poison at once, or make miserable cripples for life, every inhabitant of the Principality."

"That is not likely to happen," Lucilla objected.

"But why not?" Mervyn argued. "If war should come, we shall certainly be in the war zone. Monaco and La Turbie are fortified; so is the Corniche

Road—fortified and mined, from Mentone to Nice. War should be one of the very grimmest of necessities before it is embarked upon."

Lucilla moved in her place uneasily.

"I am weary of generalities," she said. "If war comes it will come at the bidding of those who understand, perhaps, more than we do. Therefore if it comes, I am content to accept it as a necessity."

"Well, we aren't going to fight, anyhow," Lord Bremner observed. "Not a man has been called up in England, and as for a war in the air, we've got nothing but a few parachutes and a half-completed airship. We might, perhaps, exercise moral suasion."

"In what manner?" Lucilla asked. "It would not be wise, would it, to attempt to dictate to Matorni?"

"If we did, I don't think it would hurt us much," Bremner rejoined good-humouredly. "We're a long way off, for one thing. As for moral suasion—well, there are several ways of bringing that into being."

"Look at the people running in the *place!*" Mervyn pointed out suddenly. "See, they are posting something up outside the Casino. There must be news."

He half rose to his feet, but a *maître d'hôtel* checked him.

"I can find out," he explained. "Wait but two minutes, and you shall have news, Monsieur."

He hastened out and presently returned. His expression was very grave.

"There has been an attack upon the Italian Consulate," he announced. "The Italian Consul is dangerously wounded, two of his servants and fifteen soldiers have been killed. The French flag has been hoisted, and French soldiers are across the frontier, singing the 'Marseillaise.'"

There was a further chorus of groans from the crowd of people outside. Once more the *maître d'hôtel* hurried away.

"These excitements," Lord Bremner complained, "are bad for the digestion. One might pass from tragedy to plain boiled chicken without ill effects, but a dish such as that with which we have just been served demands contemplation."

Lucilla pushed her plate away. Her eyes were fixed upon the door.

"Forgive me, dear host," she begged, "but it is difficult to eat at such a time. It is not your country which is involved, remember."

The *maître d'hôtel* came sorrowfully back. His expression was gloomier than ever.

"It grows worse!" he declared. "Yesterday, outside the Quirinal, an attempt was made on Matorni's life."

A strange stillness seemed to creep over the Princess; only her eyes asked passionate questions.

"The man fired two shots at Matorni without touching him."

"He is unhurt," the Princess murmured.—"But

then, I knew that he would be unhurt," she added. "He is selected."

"The serious part of the affair," the *maître d'-hôtel* went on, "seems to be that the would-be assassin was a Frenchman."

"That's bad," Bremner admitted. "Surely there was mischief enough without that."

"What happened to him?" Mervyn asked.

"He was torn to pieces by the mob in five minutes. Torrita's police, who were surrounding Matorni, fought hard to save him, but it was quite useless."

Lucilla smiled, and Mervyn, watching her, had a sudden mind picture of the Roman ladies who once thronged the amphitheatre of the Coliseum.

"That, at any rate, is good news," she said coldly. "It is the end those carrion should meet with every time."

"Nevertheless," Bremner pointed out, "it, without a doubt, complicates the situation. A Frenchman has attempted the life of Matorni, a Frenchman has been torn to pieces by the Italian mob, and France and Italy are already at one another's throats. What hope can there be of peace?"

"I do not hope for peace," the Princess declared, with a steely note in her tone. "I hope for war."

There was a short but intense silence. Mervyn glanced cautiously around. No one was within hearing.

"You seem shocked," she remarked. "You forget that I am an Italian. Italy has been robbed and ill-

treated for generations because she has found no statesman strong enough to demand for her her true position in Europe. Now her hour has struck. If her regeneration must come through war, then let it come through war. What Matorni decides is what Italy must accept."

"That, I think," Lord Bremner suggested quietly, "might end our political talk for the evening. Are there any places of amusement open, Mervyn, to which we might offer to conduct these ladies?"

"Nothing but the Sporting Club," was the disconsolate reply. "All the dancing places are closed."

Lucilla rose to her feet.

"I do not think," she said, "that we should be able to face the morning well if we spent a night as solemn as this in a place of amusement. It is the destiny of our country, Rosetta, which is now being moulded. One's words may sound heavy, perhaps, Lord Bremner," she added, with a faintly apologetic smile, "but these are tremendous moments. I feel inclined to say, as our peasant maidens say, 'Italy is my country, and Matorni my God.'"

They all walked out across the deserted hall on to the steps. The Senegalese porter pushed them gently back.

"I have sent the car, Madame la Princesse," he confided in a low tone, "to the side entrance. There is some rough behaviour in the town. They have ill-used two Italians already."

The Princess smiled scornfully.

"Fetch the car back again," she ordered.

The man hesitated.

"The people have once before surrounded it, Madame," he warned her.

"Nevertheless, fetch it back again," she insisted. "An Italian woman is not afraid of this scum."

Mervyn drew Rosetta on one side.

"You have influence over the Princess?" he asked.

"Not the slightest," she confessed. "This is just the sort of thing she would love to do. We shall sit side by side without speaking a word, and probably get some stones through the window. Lucilla will imagine that she's playing the Roman matron. Mervyn, dear, why hadn't those Roman matrons the slightest sense of humour?"

"Laughter is entirely a modern exercise," he reminded her. "You won't object if I see you home?"

"I should object a great deal more if you didn't," she assured him.

After all, the getting away provided little excitement. The liveries of the Princess were well enough known to the crowd, but the presence of Mervyn, the popular English tennis player, in the car, had a quietening effect, and, beyond one or two groans from the rabble who had flocked down from Beausoleil, nothing disturbing happened. Arrived at the Château, Lucilla made no excuse for immediately deserting her two companions. They found her, a quarter of an hour later, in the end octagonal

apartment of the suite of reception rooms, with receivers fastened to her ears. She looked up at their entrance.

"Matorni is unhurt," she announced. "He has spoken to the crowd. They are delirious with excitement. The National Anthem is being sung in every street of Rome. The people are behind him now, whatever may happen."

"No Red Shirt news, I suppose?" Mervyn ventured tentatively.

"Red Shirt news!" she scoffed. "That vermin have gone to their holes like rats. The attempt on Matorni's life has made the populace furious. I think that a Red Shirt, if he dared to show himself, would be torn to pieces."

Rosetta helped herself to a cigarette and brought the box to Mervyn. They stood side by side at the high open windows leading out on to the terrace, gazing eastwards.

"I think we might walk perhaps as far as the temple," Mervyn whispered.

She held him back by the arm.

"Wait!" she begged. "More news is coming."

They heard the sound of the instrument again in action, and there was played out before their eyes a silent drama. They saw Lucilla's air of eager interest change into one of alarm, then into fierce anger. They saw the fingers of one of her hands crumple tightly a lace handkerchief she had been holding. Her eyes were flashing. Her silent lips,

framed into words, seemed to be quivering with unspoken maledictions. When the message was over, there was a great weariness in her expression. Rosetta crossed the room, and her arm went round her cousin's shoulder.

"It is bad news, *carissima?*"

Lucilla make a brave effort.

"Pooh, it is nothing!" she declared. "I trouble because I know it will hurt—him. There are risings all over Italy. The anti-Fascists are demanding that Matorni should meet Cressi, their leader, before his note goes to France. As if anything they could do or say," she concluded proudly, "could move Matorni!"

They left her alone then, for consolation was impossible. Soon after Mervyn had departed, she sent Rosetta to bed, and hour after hour she waited, a still, pulsating figure in a quaintly set, speechless tragedy. When the chill airs of dawn crept into the room, and the mauves and pinks of morning stretched their level lines across the eastern sky, she woke, shivering and numbed, from a peaceless sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Some days later—days of breathless suspense—a powerful open touring car, covered with dust and with two spare wheels at each side, was driven through Monte Carlo at great speed, passed on to Cap Martin, and finally drew up before the doors of the Château de Roquebrune. The solitary passenger was of unimposing appearance. He was stout, with grey, upturned moustache, shortly cut grey hair, and stolid features, the heaviness of which, however, was somehow belied by the brilliancy of his dark eyes. He was obviously fatigued, and the chauffeur, when he had brought the car to a standstill, drooped in his seat as though about to collapse.

"Madame la Princesse?" the passenger demanded.

The majordomo and other servants from the background trooped forward.

"Madame la Princesse awaits you, Signor," the former announced. "Be so good as to come this way."

The newcomer was relieved of coat and hat by the waiting attendants.

"If the Signor will allow me to suggest it," the butler continued, "refreshments will be served at once."

"A flask of Chianti, if you have it, or a bottle of any sort of white wine," the passenger requested. "The dust sticks in one's throat."

He was shown into the octagonal reception room. Lucilla was waiting there to greet him.

"Signor Cressi!" she exclaimed.

He bowed.

"The Princess di Panini, I am sure," he murmured.

"You arrive even before you were expected," she remarked, trying to keep the hatred from her eyes.

"I motored through from Paris," he explained. "We slept on the roadside. They offered me a special train, but it would have been longer. Has Matorni arrived?"

She pointed to the window. Like a huge grey bird, a seaplane had just descended. A small motor boat was already on its way to the shore.

"He is coming," she announced.

The majordomo entered with wine and food. Lucilla, with a word or two of excuse, withdrew. Holding a sunshade over her bare head, she made her way down towards the landing stage. She watched the motor boat in its swift progress towards the quay, waved her hand to the tall figure in the stern, who rose and sprang to her side whilst the engine behind was still throbbing.

"Wait!" he called out, over his shoulder. "I do not know how soon I may return. Lucilla," he went on, as they moved up together, "it is like you to be here to greet me in this terrible hour. Tell me, has Cressi arrived?"

"Ten minutes ago. He motored from Paris."

Matorni made no comment and walked by her

side for a moment in gloomy silence. He seemed more gaunt than ever; his eyes, with their brilliant fire unsubdued, more deeply set.

"We lose, Lucilla," he said bitterly. "I fear that we lose. Has Cressi spoken?"

"Not a word."

"It remains only," he muttered, "to make defeat sound like victory."

"Everything has been so confused for days," she sighed—"even the private wireless reports. When did things begin to go wrong?"

"The day that Uguello's reports reached Cressi," Matorni rejoined gloomily.

"They reached him—the originals?" she exclaimed. "The papers he handed to Mervyn Amory?"

"They reached him," Matorni confessed. "Never again in this life shall I repose a moment's confidence in the work of any Secret Service agent. They must have gone through to Italy under Torrita's very nose, for there was a secret meeting at Milan the day after he returned. From there the thing spread like a train of gunpowder."

"The fool!" she cried.

Matorni shrugged his shoulders.

"He has made some brilliant *coups* in the past—nothing to atone for this failure, though. I think before he died he went mad. He babbled to me something about the young Frenchman who was torn to pieces—seemed to think that he should have pro-

tected him. As if I cared! It was no part of his duty to me to save the life of an assassin."

"He is dead then?"

"He shot himself at my advice," was the cold reply. "It was the best thing he could do. There is no place in my world for failures. Is the English Minister still here—Bremner?"

"He still remains."

"They say in Rome that he has a hand in the game," Matorni ruminated. "The devil knows what it may be. Oh, the pity of it, the pity of it, Lucilla! All these years of preparation to go for nothing! The most magnificent achievement of the century, the great drama of these days, to be baulked at the start! Help me through these hours, Lucilla, for if I ever needed help I need it now. I am to meet defeat with the smile of a victor. How does one do it?"

"You could never know defeat," she declared, pressing his arm.

"My spirit would never know it, I swear," he answered. "If I step back a little way, it is to climb higher.—A moment's peace, Lucilla, before we mount the steps to the villa. How they fill the air with perfume, your roses, your orange blossoms, your mimosa! It is a paradise here."

"It is here that some day I hope you may find paradise," she whispered.

He paused for a moment with half-closed eyes, baring his head to the sunshine and the perfume-laden breeze.

"Some day my strength will go," he sighed, "my heart beat faintly, and this will be my consolation—rest." . . .

The two men met upon the terrace. They shook hands as a matter of course and entered the salon together. Lucilla would have left them, but Matorni stopped her.

"Do you object to the Princess di Panini remaining with us?" he asked Cressi. "I should tell you that the Princess has my entire confidence."

"The Princess is welcome," Cressi replied. "We have only plain words to speak, but it would perhaps be as well if all Italy heard them. It is not for the sake of secrecy that I thought it best to ask you for an interview on neutral ground. You know quite well the reason."

"You were very wise," Matorni agreed coolly. "I cannot always control my followers."

"Nor I mine," Cressi acknowledged. "It would be at least as dangerous for you to enter Florence as it would be for me to appear in Rome."

Matorni waved his hand.

"We each have something to say to the other. Let me hear you first, Cressi."

"Very well," the other assented. "Matorni, there must be no war."

"Why not?"

"Because my followers hate war," was the emphatic reply. "I hate it myself. Men are born to work, to live, and to enjoy the results of their labour. That

sacred thing in their veins which we call life is a fragment of divinity. The dung sweeper of the street possesses it, as you and I do. Even the peasant was born to live his days in the sunshine, to beget children, and to enjoy the fruits of the earth. He was never meant to become the puppet of another man's ambition, to pour out his blood upon the battlefield, and know no reason why. This war for which you have schemed would be, if it came to pass, a war of rampant imperialism, a war planned for the gratification of personal ambition, a war of conquest."

"Pardon me—of re-conquest," Matorni interrupted icily.

"We are not here for argument," Cressi continued. "The subject is a matter of history. What the French won from us eighty years ago, they may hold, so far as we are concerned. I repeat that there must be no war, Matorni. You may say that you control the press of the country, the finances, the police, and the Senate, and yet you are not strong enough to keep our voice from being heard. If you defy us, we have serious matter for publication in the press of the world. Where we have no newspapers we will use the foreign press, we will placard the walls of every city of Italy with copies of your correspondence with foreign powers, with proof that your agents have even gone so far as to plan these outrages upon the frontier, in order to drag the people of Italy into a bloody war. Remember, we have a

signed copy of your agreement with Germany. We have absolute and overwhelming proof of the fact that you have deliberately, step by step, planned to break once more the peace of the world and lead the armies of Italy into a new and bloody holocaust. The people—I speak to you in their name, Matorni—will not have it. You may count the politicians, the aristocracy, the older men of the nation on your side, but the people at the cost of whose blood your victories were to be gained, refuse. They have suffered enough. They will not have war."

"Is this your message?" Matorni asked, after a moment's pause.

"Not all of it," Cressi answered. "If my message had been one of defiance only, if I had been planning for your personal downfall, as well as the downfall of your ill-begotten schemes, I could have launched my thunderbolts in Italy. I had another word to say to you, Matorni. I have told you what the people want. Give them peace, and they may dye their shirts."

"What do you mean?" Matorni demanded.

Cressi straightened himself. He had been walking up and down the room with short, vigorous strides, his head and shoulders bent, his stomach protuberant. He stopped, took a cigarette from a box, and smoked for a moment furiously.

"You are a great man, Matorni," he said. "Upon our side we have no great man. According to your lights you are a patriot. We have no quarrel with

such. It is our misfortune that to the skirts of our party have clung the riffraff of the world. We do not want them. We are moderate. We want honest government, peace, prosperity, increasing wealth. All those things you were beginning to give us."

"You admit it!" Matorni exclaimed.

"Freely. Go on giving them. Wipe out for ever this scheme of yours. Govern the country for peace, and, although I cannot control the scum, I promise you this: two thirds of those who have donned the Red Shirts shall be your men. Proceed with the war and there shall be a revolution in every city of Italy. Your war material factories will be burned, your railroads destroyed. You will lead a disheartened army, and there will be a stream of deserters all the time making their way back home. Be wise, Matorni. The people of Italy are still yours, but not for war."

Matorni sat for several moments in frowning contemplation.

"You come late, Cressi," he said. "How can I hold my hand now with honour?"

"France gives you the opportunity," was the swift reply. "It was to make your task easier that I came to you from Paris. I had an interview with the Premier and the President. France does not know the truth about this last incident, or if she does, she wisely ignores it. Here is a copy of the reply to your note which you will find in Rome. It was handed to me in Paris on Tuesday night. You will see that it declines your challenge and ignores

your thunders. It is dignified, but it makes for peace."

Matorni glanced through the few typewritten sheets and nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes," he agreed, "one could frame a suitable reply to that. Withdrawal would, after all, be possible. —There is still a serious matter to be faced though, Cressi. Those papers which Uguello's agent stole for him in Berlin?"

Cressi pointed to the oak bureau.

"Write your reply to France with me now," he urged, "and the papers are yours. I will pledge you my word that you shall never be attacked on account of them. The actual documents shall be destroyed by you and me together."

Matorni turned away. It was the passing of his life's dream, and he felt the need of solitude.

"For five minutes," he said, "I shall walk upon the terrace. At the end of that time I will give you my reply."

He left them abruptly. They heard his long, uneven footsteps as he strode to and fro. Lucilla watched his every movement anxiously. Her heart was torn with pain and sympathy, but after all there was hope. This man Cressi had been no harbinger of humiliation. The minutes passed by. Matorni returned to them.

"Come outside, Lucilla, and you, Cressi," he enjoined. "There is something here which I do not understand."

They all three stood together, looking seaward. From one end of the horizon to the other stretched what seemed to be a number of small black smudges. It was an amazing, and at first, an unintelligible sight. Cressi smiled as he threw out his hand dramatically.

"There," he proclaimed, "is the other great argument in favour of peace. You were right, Matorni, in half of what you said. England is absolutely immovable as regards another war on land, but you know what that is?"

"There is no doubt about what it is," Matorni replied. "Ships—an enormous quantity of them. But whose are they? The French fleet is at Toulon."

"That," Cressi announced, "is the whole of the British Mediterranean Squadron, with a strong American visiting complement."

"But—are they coming here?" Lucilla gasped.

"In friendly fashion, of course. You will see the announcement in to-morrow morning's paper. You will probably find it amongst the telegrams at the Casino to-night. There has been an outbreak of scarlet fever, or smallpox, I forget which, in Malta, and the whole fleet is accepting the hospitality of the suitable French harbours from Toulon to Villefranche."

Matorni, who had brought some field glasses from the salon, swept the horizon with them thoughtfully. Then he recrossed the threshold of the room.

"I accept your offer, Cressi," he decided; "I accept your offer of an alliance. We will work together for Italy. Now sit down, and we will draft our reply to the French note."

CHAPTER XXXIV

Monte Carlo was looking at its very best the next morning, about the hour of the *apéritif*. The Mediterranean, as far as one could see, was like a great blue lake, soft and placid, iridescent with a million brilliant sparks of sunshine. There was a fair sprinkling of people seated at the various tables in front of the Café de Paris, and the usual crowd waiting for the morning bulletin outside the Casino. A general sense of hopelessness prevailed everywhere. Even the *Éclaireur*, which had sedulously preached moderation, and minimised the probabilities of war, admitted that, in the face of the recent fighting, the chances of peace were scanty. The square was full of French soldiers arrived during the night, and up on the distant hills an apparently endless stream of artillery waggons was crawling along. Many of the shops were already closed, and most of the tradespeople were busy packing their stock. The Terrace was thronged with people watching the incoming ships, which every one believed to be the French fleet, amazingly augmented, preparing for coast-defence action. The air was filled with rumours that war had already been declared. The appearance of Mervyn, coming down the steps of the Hôtel de Paris, in tennis flannels, created a mild and not altogether favourable sensation. "*Ces Anglais! Ils ont du sang froid!*" one of the loiterers sneered. The Senegalese at the door saluted sadly.

"Bulletins up yet?" Mervyn asked.

"Not yet, sir," the man answered. "They tell me they've begun fighting up in the hills."

"Nonsense!" Mervyn scoffed, stopping to light a cigarette. "Why, we haven't even heard a gun."

"They may be fighting without artillery," the man suggested.

Monsieur Deuillet joined them on the steps.

"Any news?" he asked gloomily.

"Yes, there is news," Mervyn replied with decision. "This place is full of silly rumours. Now, if you would like real, important, serious news, here it is!"

"Good news?" the manager gasped.

Mervyn pointed seaward.

"That," he announced, "is not the French fleet at all. There isn't a French ship there. That is a combined English and American squadron, powerful enough, if the necessity arose, to blow either the French or the Italian fleet out of the water."

Monsieur Deuillet became a quivering mass of excitement.

"But what does it mean?" he demanded, grasping Mervyn by the arm.

"It is what is commonly called a 'demonstration,'" Mervyn explained. "Neither America nor England is anxious to interfere. They want the peace of the world kept, and this is just a hint as to what might happen to either country rash enough to provoke hostilities. What it really means," he

went on impressively, "is that there isn't going to be any war. If you take my advice, Monsieur Deuillet, you'll go back to your reception bureau and have your clerks send out a few hundred telegrams to all your clients, inviting them to come back again and finish the season."

Monsieur Deuillet, however, had other fish to fry. He rushed across the square to the Casino, he rushed out again to the Café de Paris. He was all over the place, spreading the news. It flashed like an electric thrill throughout the scattered crowds. Even those who failed to understand what it meant threw up their hats with joy.

"*La Marine Anglaise!*"

The shout was repeated on every hand, and a rush was made towards the Terrace. Through the diminishing crowd, a large, closed automobile slowly made its way to the entrance to the Paris, and Rosetta and Lord Bremner descended. Rosetta's face was alight with joy. She embraced Mervyn frankly upon the steps.

"Mervyn—Mervyn, it is wonderful!" she cried. "There will be no war, and every one seems happy about it."

Bremner nodded. He was looking a little weary.

"They sent for me at the Château in the middle of the night," he confided. "Matorni is there, and Cressi, the leader of the Italian democrats. Your papers have scotched the war. Cressi and Matorni have come to an agreement. They sent for me to help

draft the reply to France. There is to be no war."

The three clasped hands. People gathered round curiously. The crowd from the Terrace, now returning, made a rush. They surrounded the little group upon the hotel steps.

"England will fight?" some one called out.

"She will do better," Bremner replied. "America and England will stop the fighting. There will be no war."

Up the hill as far as Beausoleil, the rumour spread. "The English milord, the *Ministre Anglais*, has declared that there will be no war." The tradespeople left their packing, the shopkeepers trooped out, hatless and coatless. Bremner, struggling to cross the square, was surrounded. Questions in every language were shouted at him. He reached the Casino steps with difficulty, whilst the attendants and a couple of gendarmes did their best to keep the people back. Bremner raised his hand, and there was comparative silence.

"I have seen Matorni's reply to France," he announced. "A copy of it will be posted here within a very few minutes. Matorni has consented to a commission, and the troops on each side are to be moved twenty kilometres back from the frontier. It is the English and American fleet which approaches. There will be peace!"

For a moment the people seemed stunned. There were shouts of applause, then murmurs of doubt. Bremner was well enough known to most of them. He

was an English Cabinet Minister, it was true, but how was it that he should know these things? Then, suddenly, in the great window which had been cleared for the purpose, there appeared the morning's bulletin, printed in great characters. People fought their way forward, but it could be read from a distance of twenty or thirty yards:

COPY OF NOTE DESPATCHED BY AEROPLANE THIS MORNING TO PARIS:

THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT ACCEPTS WITH THE DEEPEST SATISFACTION THE EXPLANATIONS AND EXPRESSIONS OF REGRET OFFERED BY THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AS TO THE UNFORTUNATE INCIDENTS WHICH HAVE RECENTLY OCCURRED UPON THEIR JOINT FRONTIERS. IT RECIPROCATES EARNESTLY THE DESIRE OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT THAT NOTHING SHOULD HAPPEN TO DISTURB THE GOOD RELATIONS EXISTING BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND IT CONSENTS JOYFULLY TO THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL TROOPS FROM DANGEROUS PROXIMITY TO THE FRONTIER, AND TO THE APPOINTMENT OF A MIXED COMMISSION TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF DEALING WITH THESE INCIDENTS, AND OF MAKING SUCH PLANS AS WILL RENDER THEM UNLIKELY IN THE FUTURE.

(SIGNED) MATORNI.

Bremner chuckled as they edged their way out of the crowd.

"A certain amount of humbug about it, of course," he confided to his two companions. "On the other hand, it's absolutely genuine in substance. Cressi, the Italian democrat, and Matorni have joined forces, and there is no longer the slightest chance of war."

Pandemonium reigned throughout the Principality. People thronged to the cafés, shook hands with everybody, cheered for everybody, sang the "Marseillaise" and "God Save the King" till their throats were hoarse. The manager of the Hôtel de Paris ordered free champagne in the lounge, and strode up and down his *bureau*, dictating telegrams to his clients. A *Feu de Joie* boomed out from the Rock of Monaco, and it was announced that the Prince would offer his people that night their greatest treat—a display of *Feu d'Artifices*—and that it was his desire that the night should be observed as a gala one. Guido and Francis pressed free drinks upon their clientèle who kept trooping up from all parts of the place. From their table in the garden of the Royalty, the three latest arrivals watched a grey-winged seaplane rise over the trees and shoot away eastwards.

"They've gone back together like brothers in arms," Bremner announced. "A great day for Italy!"

Rosetta touched Mervyn's arm. He was gazing

out at the fleet, rapidly growing into shape.

"Why do you look there so earnestly?" she asked.

"Because," he confided, "I've got one or two pals amongst the chaplains of the Mediterranean Squadron, and I'm wondering whether we could save a day or two."

She laughed happily.

"Why, we've only four days to wait as it is," she reminded him.

Guido, perspiring, excited and happy, arrived with another tray of cocktails.

"It must be," he declared; "to-day it must be! If we live to a hundred, we shall never know such another. Mr. Amory—Signorina la Comtessa—"

"Drink our healths yourself, Guido," Mervyn interrupted. "We're going to be married on Thursday."

Guido took up a glass with trembling fingers.

"Shall I not drink to your happiness!" he exclaimed. "And shall I not drink to it with gratitude in my heart, because, Signorina la Comtessa, and Mr. Amory, I know—yes, I know something."

He bustled away a moment later. Bremner tapped a cigarette upon the table.

"Well," he said, "we laugh at the novelists who go in for that sort of thing, but here we have the proof that a great deal goes on that few people know anything about. I don't suppose, for instance, the world will ever know that it is you two young people between you who have stopped the war."

"It was Mervyn," Rosetta murmured, thrusting her arm through his.

"It was Rosetta," Mervyn insisted.

"Well, whichever it was," Bremner decided, "you've done pretty well for yourselves out of it."

THE END

ABBOT PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 3011 00049 9671

6876 025